

GUEST COLUMN

Closure was anticipated, planned for

I've been reading in the paper and hearing in the community a sense of angst about the potential for closing one of Bedford's elementary school buildings. I'm finding it somewhat inconsistent that, at the national level we all want government to get smaller and more efficient; but at the local level (where we in Michigan know about tough economic times) we'd be so hesitant to exercise that same fiscal prudence.

I understand the concern of parents with young children in the elementary. No one wants their child to have to move to a new school. No one wants to give up the security they've enjoyed or the familiarity they've experienced in their current educational setting. This is not the first time Bedford has had to consider this type of situation, and our history shows us that the children will do fine, and the school district will continue to function on the same high level of performance that we've come to appreciate.

When my wife and I moved to Bedford in 1988 with two school-aged children, Temperance Road Elementary was the administration building, not an elementary school. I know because my office was in TRE. As the district's enrollment dwindled in the '70s, TRE was closed as an elementary building, and the space was used to house the administration, community education, adult education, the Open Door program and incubator space for what is now Monroe County Community College's Whit-

man Center, the Family Medical Center and Spring Arbor College's off-campus center.

At that time Jackman Road, Smith Road and Douglas Road elementaries were K-6 buildings with all of the kindergartens at Smith Road. In the early 90s, as enrollments grew at the elementary, the sixth grade was moved to the junior high school and the ninth grade was moved from the junior high to the high school. I remember the same angst among school parents then that I hear now.

But I urge parents to put those fears aside and get on board with these changes. The kids will do just fine. The dedicated and caring staff of the Bedford Public Schools will make sure that they succeed and grow educationally just as they have always done. During my 12 years as an administrator in the school district I worried a lot about keeping the district on a sound financial footing, I worried about orchestrating the various operational changes that needed to take place, but I never worried that the children would be short-changed. I knew that the teachers and staff were committed to making any change a smooth and successful experience for everyone.

Parents, relax. My children went through the changes you are facing and they did just fine. They got a great education at Bedford and are both successful adults with families of their own. Your children will do fine, too. We've been through this before and it worked; it will work now.

I would urge the administration and the board to consider not selling whatever elementary they choose to close. If property needs to be sold, better to look at moving the administration to an elementary and selling the administration building.

The current administration building was purchased when enrollment growth forced the district to reactivate TRE. Prior to that time it was a strip mall. When it was purchased, the realization was that in the future, if a downsizing became necessary, a strip mall was probably a whole lot more marketable than an elementary building. Furthermore, by moving the administration into the closed elementary, the district preserves a vital investment in a classroom building that just might be needed in the future.

I understand the tough decisions with which our board of education and administration are wrestling. We've been here before. I have confidence that they will make good and sound decisions just as past boards and administrations have. But I have even greater confidence that the dedicated and caring teachers and staff in our district will make the upcoming changes a successful experience for children.

**Denzil Bell
Temperance**

Mr. Bell is the former assistant superintendent of business and general administration for Bedford Public Schools. He retired in 2000.