

GUEST VIEW |
MARGE MacPHERSON

A plea for fine arts in schools

A headline in a local paper took my eye ... Some win, some lose with budget deal. My first thought ... the children are the losers.

The last information I had was that proposed cuts in Elmira City Schools would eliminate 14 out of 25 music positions and 7 out of 14 art positions. In other words, eliminate the Fine Arts program.

As a retired music educator, I'd like to address just one area of cuts – the vocal music program. We are told that elementary music and art are mandated to be taught in grades kindergarten–grade 6, but not necessarily by a certified specialist.

So who will teach these – the classroom teachers? Already stressed by the demands of the testing program and the number of children who have special needs ... now we add to their schedule, music, art and physical education. I don't think this is possible.

The whole foundation of the vocal music program is in kindergarten through third grade. Attitudes, singing voices, appreciation of the classics, rhythmic skills, creativity are all very carefully sequenced.

As a community we are continually thrilled by the wonderful programs presented in our middle schools and high schools. In the past few weeks I have attended outstanding performances ... "Phantom of the Opera" at Corning West High School, "Camelot" at EFA, "Mame" at Southside High School and "Sound of Music" at Horseheads High School.

How long can these standards continue if we begin eroding the very foundation on which they are built? Think of the program as a house. The high schools are the roof, grades 4-8 are the sides and kindergarten- grade 3 represent the foundation. How long will the house stand without a foundation?

I urge members of the community to check the cuts in programs. Find out how they will impact your children and grandchildren. Make your voices heard. Parents, talk to your children. Graduates of Elmira City Schools who have benefited from these programs – there are thousands and thousands of you – how important was this training to you?

A friend wrote ... "Education is about developing the whole child – mind, soul and body, through the arts, the curriculum and physical education." Music is formed in the right side of the brain – language in the left – we need to develop both.

■ **Marge MacPherson is a music teacher retired from the Elmira City School District.**

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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | **SEN. TOM O'MARA**

A month of 'meth'

It was nearly one year ago when I wrote the following in a column:

"We could give a meth-bust-of-the-month award around here." I wrote that observation after noting a series of local methamphetamine-related arrests and other incidents that were dominating the headlines throughout the early months of last year – including one of New York's largest-ever meth lab discoveries in Schuyler County.

Now, almost one year later, we're coming off a month of March that was also a month of meth locally – another series of Southern Tier arrests capped off by last week's State Police raid of a clandestine lab in Tuscarora, Steuben County.

So it's a good time to recall what we've been reminded of time after time over the past decade that meth has alarmingly spread across the nation: stay on guard.

We need to remember that once a culture of meth takes root anywhere, it spins out of control. It takes an unimaginable toll on local systems of health care and social services. It produces violent crime, drug-endangered children and hazardous waste. It puts police officers and first responders at enormous risk.

We're always wise to remember a 2005 report from the State Commission of Investigation (SIC) that warned how meth would become a

dire public health and safety threat unless New York adopted new and tougher laws to combat the drug's proliferation. That report, Methamphetamine Use & Manufacture, warned that without action and awareness "New York could become a haven for methamphetamine users and manufacturers." Alarmingly, it highlighted the Southern Tier as a hotbed of criminal meth activity.

And it sparked a strong, bipartisan legislative effort that produced New York's first comprehensive strategy to combat the manufacture and sale of methamphetamine. The 2005 law put in place tough new criminal penalties to outlaw clandestine labs; promoted greater community awareness and education; recognized the danger to children; and sought to address the environmental hazards associated with meth labs.

It was one of New York's landmark anti-drug laws and, as we've witnessed ever since, it's initiated many effective deterrence, enforcement and prevention strategies. But as the recent local arrests prove, we can never rest easy against meth – or, for that matter, against any other highly addictive drug and illegal drug trafficking. The very fact of the recent arrests tells the good news, of course, that the State Police, together with local law enforcement officers, are far from sitting back.

We simply can't say enough about their commitment and diligence in this regard.

Still, public awareness and education remain crucial. Seven years ago it literally became a crusade among police officers, district attorneys, legislators, news reporters, first responders, educators and concerned citizens to help defend our communities and neighborhoods. There was a steady drumbeat of public awareness, which can never be underestimated. Some of the arrests we've seen over the past year, in fact, were initiated by watchful citizens who didn't hesitate to alert local law enforcement to suspicious activity.

It's an important reminder. So we keep renewing the anti-meth effort in education and prevention, public awareness, law enforcement, and public policy. Right now in the state Legislature, for example, legislation has been introduced to establish a new registry as a way to monitor the whereabouts of meth convicts. Another measure would require New York to join other states that have put in place systems for tracking sales of over-the-counter cold medicines commonly used in meth manufacturing.

But it always starts with a simple, straightforward message: don't underestimate the danger.

■ **Sen. Tom O'Mara is a Republican from Big Flats.**

OTHER VIEW |
**SAN JOSE
MERCURY NEWS**

FDA should restrict use of antibiotics in livestock

Eighty percent of the antibiotics used in the United States aren't taken by people. They are given to animals, often to promote growth rather than because the animals actually are sick.

The Food and Drug Administration has known this for more than 30 years. It has also known for decades that antibiotics in animals, over time, decrease the effectiveness of penicillin and tetracycline in humans. It shouldn't have taken a federal judge's ruling last week to push the government to enforce a ban on agricultural uses of popular antibiotics. Nor should the Obama administration allow ranchers to skirt the issue, as widely expected, and keep giving antibiotics to their animals to "protect" their flocks and herds from potential health outbreaks.

Scientists and doctors find that the number of effective antibiotics is in decline, and they are alarmed by the challenge of developing new medicines to fight infections. The FDA needs to help protect the antibiotics we have, even if it is at the expense of animals or of agriculture profits.

The agriculture industry has brought this problem on itself through the practice of packing chickens, cattle and pigs into tightly constrained spaces. These conditions put additional stress on the animals and increase the odds that diseases will occur and spread.

Until now, the FDA has issued guidelines on antibiotic use and hoped ranchers would follow them, but the guidelines have been largely ignored.

Now it's time for regulation.

Animals should receive antibiotics only when a veterinarian demonstrates that they are sick. If the FDA cannot make that stick, Congress should step in and write legislation requiring it. While political leaders may argue about how much to help other Americans get health care, surely they can agree on something that threatens their own lives or their families' despite their generous health insurance coverage.

OTHER VIEW | **LOS ANGELES TIMES**

Better tools must be employed smartly

Racial profiling by police is notoriously difficult to prove.

That's not, as former Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton used to insist, because it's uniquely difficult to get inside an officer's head and determine why he pulled over this suspect or that. Analyzing the intent behind offenses is actually fairly commonplace – it undergirds hate-crime prosecutions, many assaults (a murder, for instance, is distinguishable from manslaughter by the intent of the perpetrator) and even civil rights violations, which generally must be committed with the intent to deprive a person of a protected right. No, what makes racial profiling so hard to prove is that it's

usually most apparent in statistics, not individual acts.

An officer can almost always produce an explanation for why he or she pulled over a driver. A broken taillight, a failure to signal, speeding – all those are legitimate reasons to wave a driver to the curb. When it becomes obnoxious – and illegal – is when an officer sees those violations only when they are committed by people of a certain race. Long before "racial profiling" became the phrase of art, this vile habit was named for those victimized by it: "driving while black."

Now, the Los Angeles Police Department, which once was widely suspected of engaging in racial profiling, has identified an officer it says is guilty of the

offense. Tellingly, the allegations against Officer Patrick Smith – if true – include a clear sign of his intent, which was in part to deceive those who analyze statistics. According to sources in the department, Smith falsified reports to suggest that he was pulling over whites when in fact some of those he identified as white were Latino. Smith has been found guilty of nothing. Still, it is worth noting that doctoring official records would make his numbers look fine but also would suggest a need to cover up something, and could be evidence that the officer's intent was improper. What may fool the statistics may prove the crime.

The advent of sophisticated, usually computerized, tracking has allowed

police departments greater insight into the actions of officers – and, thus, clues about who may be indulging in racism – but better tools must be employed smartly. A traffic officer who stops only blacks or Latinos while working in West Los Angeles is probably missing something or covering up something; an officer working a night shift in South Los Angeles might well be fully justified in making such stops exclusively, because he might go an entire shift without seeing a single white driver. Smart analysis of that data can help officials sniff out trouble, but it won't always be enough. Where they find deception, they may see all too clearly into an officer's head.