Knight Life Publication Policy
Got opinions? Disagree with something we've said? Just want to get your say in the paper?
Write us!

Direct letters to the Editor to:
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Loy Norrix
606 East Kilgore
Kalamazoo, MI 49001
-OR-
Submit to Room B-10
-OR-
E-mail to pankoptl@kalamazo.k12.mi.us

Guidelines:
-250 words or less
-Contain author's name, phone number, and address

Right to withhold:
-As space permits
-Guest columns
-Personal opinions
-Contains libel or obscenities
-Disrupts school environment
-Invades privacy of others

Notes to reader:
-Any photography that has been manipulated will be labeled a photo illustration.
-Knight Life will publish a formal correction of any factual error made in a previous issue.

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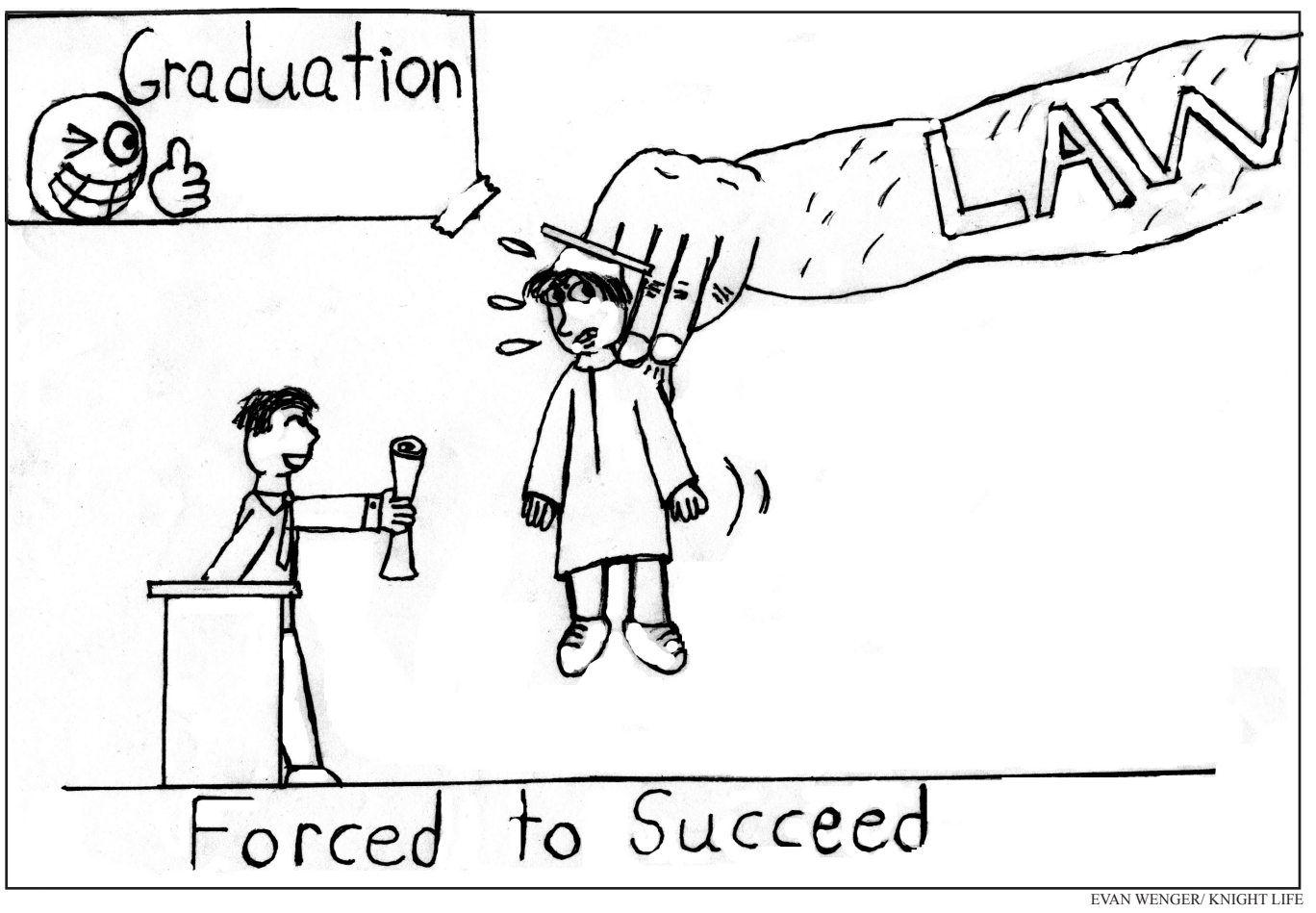
Raising the Dropout Age a Waste of Time

-Staff Editorial



EVAN WENGER/ KNIGHT LIFE

A "Drop-Out Factory" is defined as a school with 60% or less of its students that graduate. According to this definition, both Kalamazoo Central and Loy Norrix High School are currently labeled as dropout factories.

In a desperate attempt to raise these low percentages, lawmakers in Michigan have been considering raising the legal dropout age from 16 years of age to 18. The original drop-out age of 16 was created in 1895 when agriculture was the main source of jobs, and a high school diploma was less essential to being successful in life.

In order to help this generation's youth succeed in life, the Michigan government has been considering raising the dropout age by two years and in doing so will waste tax money and valuable time in which lawmakers could be doing something else, like reforming school systems.

While raising the dropout age may seem like a good idea in principle, only some students will take the new law into serious consideration. The reality is that forcing apathetic students to stay in school when they have no intention of learning is a waste of resources. It would cost the state of Michigan $267 million in per pupil aid. Michigan already spends nearly $10 billion out of the $13.3 billion budget on school funding. Spending this much money on unmotivated students will accomplish nothing. It is important for a school district to produce quality students by spending time on developing the student's skills, as opposed to dealing with discipline. Keeping such disruptive students in class ruins the learning experience for everyone who wants to be there.

Legally raising the dropout age will not, unfortunately, help to keep students in school. Middle schoolers are dropping out of school as it is. Obviously, an eighth grader is not yet at the age of 16. Students stop coming because of family reasons (having to get a job to support their family etc...) all the time, and even though Michigan lawmakers say that they are trying to stop such activity, it still happens every day.

Worrying about students who drop out is a distraction from the more serious issues. The way to stop students from dropping out is to make school a place they want to be. Forcing students to learn the same information since the fifth grade (i.e. the rock cycle and the colonization of America) only bores students who could be taking other classes where they would learn something new. Schools should reform their curriculum to keep students interested, and then they will find that students want to stay in school.

Demonstrating how the information students learn at school can be used in real life will encourage students to stay in school. Students are expected to know everything the school teaches them, but rarely does the teacher tell them how classroom material will be useful in the future. With no reason to learn the information in a class, students lose motivation to do well in school. If we don't know why we need it, then why bother learning it?

Raising the dropout age would convince a miniscule amount of people to stay in school. With 14 year old kids skipping class now, it is more important to focus on students who want to be there than to waste resources on those who do not. It is a step in the right direction, but if you want to keep kids in school, give them a reason to stay.

Just Itching to Discuss it

The Disabled Don't Want their Impairments Ignored

Christina Pillsbury
Opinion Editor

When you see a young man in a wheelchair making his way down the street, it seems like it would be so much easier to avert your eyes and ignore him. It would be too awkward to catch his eye and smile; what if he's offended by the way you smile, or that you don't stop and help him? But what if he's offended if you don't look?

Similarly, when you meet someone with an apparent disability, disease, or condition, it may seem too awkward to ask the reason for the confinement to a wheelchair, or the story behind their prosthetic leg or arm. You may feel like you're sparing a man by ignoring his obvious disability. This actually isn't the case; From my experience, most people with disabilities would prefer people ask them questions rather than ignoring their obvious impairment, or being overly cautious about it.

Having grown up in a household with a disabled father, I have more insight on the topic of disability than most. I have seen my own dad in the hospital more times than I can count, I have seen the paramedics pick him up off the floor, and I have seen him struggle with speaking, sitting up straight, or other simple tasks more than any child should have to. However, even with all this experience, I am still uncomfortable in public around people with disabilities with which I am unfamiliar. It's hard to admit, but many feel the same way.

It can be uncomfortable in public with my dad, others often don't know how to react. Many people will jump around the subject, scared to ask me why my dad is in a wheelchair. I usually smile, and explain to them about the progressive disease Multiple Sclerosis, and how it affects a person's body and mind. It's not an uncomfortable subject for me, and many people with disabilities want you to ask, for they rarely get to talk about it.

Because it is unfamiliar to most people, disability is often avoided in conversation. Many people are uncomfortable around people in wheelchairs, people with prosthetic limbs, or people with a severe mental disability. It is often unfamiliar territory, and therefore disability is not often discussed, especially in terms of people's comfortability with the issue. Admitting that you are uncomfortable around people with severe disabilities is difficult, and oftentimes embarrassing.

> Most people with disabilities would prefer people ask them questions rather than ignoring their obvious impairment, or being overly cautious about it.

It is not socially acceptable to admit to being uncomfortable around people in wheelchairs, but it's something that is so prevalent that it should be addressed. This is just another topic that is often avoided, which only perpetuates the problem. If you feel uncomfortable, try asking a person about their disability. Odds are, they're just itching to discuss it.

Attending KPS Offers Many Benefits

Anne Brown
Photo Editor

If I had the option to start my schooling over and go to a well-off, more successful school district instead of Kalamazoo Public Schools, I wouldn't do it. There are a lot of things I really dislike about our school system, but I wouldn't change my experience for anything. I think being exposed to a diverse population as a young student has helped me appreciate and understand other people and cultures. I've grown up with kids of all different races, religions, and socio-economic classes, that to think of switching to a subarban school system would be a big change from what I'm used to.

Attending Lincoln Elementary from third to sixth grade, I quickly picked up on the urban/hip-hop scene in Kalamazoo, which was very different from where I transferred from, Parkwood-Upjohn Elementary. I first learned who Usher was in 3rd grade, and I can remember the day I heard "Hot in Here" by Nelly. Ever since those days, hip-hop music, along with the urban attitude that KPS is notorious for, have always stuck with me as a part of my life.

One of the most beneficial things about KPS and LN in specific is that although I don't relate to a lot of the students in our school, I can appreciate them. With so many different backgrounds and personalities mixing together, you have more options to stretch your comfort zone and get to know someone new. I'm comfortable with so much variety around me. Our school benefits, as well as struggles because we take on so many differences between students and teachers alike.

Despite my love for LN, some students aren't as ambitious or self-motivated as others, which can hold back the rest of the student body from achieving their best. I can't stand being stuck in a class where you spend half of the class time trying to get one girl to stop doing her hair, two guys to stop arguing, and the rest of the class to wake up and pay attention. This part of our school system can be so distracting for students who are actually in school to get work done and make it through the year.

However, if you have the right mind-set, you can learn a lot from this environment. You learn what you can and can't tolerate, and if you're determined enough, you learn how to avoid situations the next time around.

The varied student body of our school system helps teach students how to appreciate and understand each other, despite the differences based on background and personality. I've become such an open-minded person when it comes to race, religion, heritage and relationships because of my schooling at KPS. You learn that even when you don't like someone, you either have to suck it up and deal with it or work around them because the person still exists whether you like it or not.

Our school system opens up a lot of tensions and frustrations between ethnicities, sides of town and languages that do exist in the real world at an even a deeper level. When you finally do graduate from high school and start to experience life for yourself, you are more prepared for social challenges that will come up in your life than anyone who had their high school career uninterrupted by social issues.

On a personal level, I know I'm a mentally stronger person because I go to LN. I've dealt with so much hate, violence, and offensiveness that I know what to expect and how to stand up for myself when I'm not getting what I want or deserve. The difficulties in this school system have made me an aggressive person who won't stop until I reach what I'm looking for, and I'm so thankful for that. I wouldn't take back a single day of struggle in this school because I know that whatever I've dealt with has made me better.

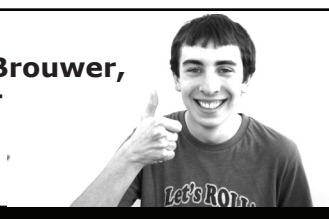
Knights Speak Out

What advice do you [upperclassmen] have for underclassmen?

Derick Jones, Junior

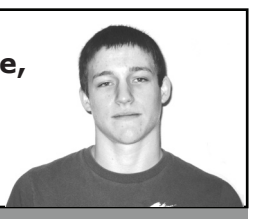
"Don't get caught up with other kids and do your work too."

Brad Brouwer, Junior



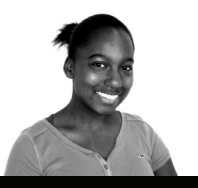
"Stay true to yourself and be cool."

Nikk Gillespie, Senior



"Beware of the security guards and wear your I.D. at all times."

Lena Charles, Senior



"Don't worry about being liked, and focus on your education."