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We Shouldn't Have to Pay Costs for Teachers' Kids to Attend WF Schools

As we approach the school budget vote, I learned that there are 29 students from out of district attending allegedly overcrowded schools at no cost. These are children of teachers who do not reside in Westfield. This costs the taxpayers approximately \$300,000 per year (\$10,000 per student). This was agreed to by our board of education.

Also, the current contract allows full-time, 12-month employees to work one hour less per day during July and August for full pay. Our board's answer to last year's budget defeat is to open polls longer at greater expense supposedly for increased participation. It is interesting that the board was not concerned with partici-

ation when it scheduled the referendum on the turf field 10 days before Christmas in 2004.

Perhaps we need a few budget defeats so that our board members negotiate a bit harder on our behalf. Perhaps professional negotiators are needed. We should not have to pay out-of-district students to attend Westfield schools and then be threatened with reduction of programs and teachers if we dare vote against the budget. The points I indicate in this letter save money without impacting our Westfield students.

Robert Tarte
Westfield

Everyday Mathematics is Basis for Core Curriculum Standards

I would like to point out some misconceptions regarding the Everyday Mathematics program that have been promulgated in recent issues of *The Westfield Leader*. Everyday Mathematics or "Chicago Math" was not adopted by the Westfield Board of Education to inflict torture on the parents of elementary school children. It was adopted because it follows the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which, in turn, form the basis for the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) for the Study of Mathematics. Adoption of the state standards, which were published in 1996 and updated in 2002, enables Westfield's elementary students to excel on the NJASK, GEPA and HSPA tests. The administration of these tests is required by the No Child Left Behind Act.

The NJCCCS calls for the use of calculators and estimations (where appropriate) by the end of second grade. In fact, my eldest daughter was using both calculators and estimations in kindergarten at Franklin School in 1992, long before the NJCCCS were adopted and Everyday Math was introduced in Westfield.

The characteristics of Everyday Mathematics, such as discovery learning, social learning and spiral progression have their basis in the theories of the Swiss researcher Jean Piaget and other modern child psychologists who have studied the

ways that children develop cognitively. The program has been tested for its effectiveness and the results of these tests have been published in peer-reviewed journals. The program has been adopted in some Abbott districts and comparable districts in other states that also receive federal funds, which implies that it meets the strict criteria of the No Child Left Behind Act.

I have worked as a substitute teacher in Scotch Plains, and Everyday Mathematics is their district-wide elementary curriculum; it has not been dropped by the district.

Furthermore, the "new math" of the 1960's was developed as a response to the Soviets' launch of Sputnik. The United States responded by attempting to educate a cohort of students who would become the next generation's engineers and scientists and win the Cold War (and who would presumably learn to add, subtract, multiply and divide no matter how). Growing up in Trumbull, Conn. during the 1960's, I had a positive experience with new math because I lived in a community where the parents were supportive and the teachers embraced change. I'm sorry that Ms. Frey had an unhappy experience with that program.

Christine Mason
Westfield

Scotch Plains Does Not Have Enough Fields for Township Sports Programs

For my family, next month marks the fifth-year anniversary of our arrival to Scotch Plains from a Chicago suburb where we lived for six years. My employer transferred me to our NY/NJ sales office. We learned two things about living in Scotch Plains: neighbors and residents of this community are first-rate, and taxes of all kinds are much higher than anything we experienced in Chicago.

Since our arrival, we added one member to our family, and both she, two, our son, six, my wife and I look forward to many more years of enjoying all the sports and recreation the community has to offer. It is along these lines that I write you.

I can speak from an extensive resume of coaching, managing and officiating sporting events for 12 years. The opportunities for young boys and girls in our community to play sports at all ages is very robust and down-right impressive. Before my move, I served on the board of directors for a YMCA and officiated flag football and basketball games in Pennsylvania and Illinois. Scotch Plains has allowed me to continue this work. Through the recreation department, I oversee a winter and summer basketball clinics and a winter leagues basketball official.

I have coached my son's soccer team for six seasons, and am ready to be an assistant coach for his T-ball squad. I am a strong advocate that sports not only keeps our children healthy and active, but allows them to build friendships, teaches discipline and respect and provides organization and structure in their lives at an early age. All of this is good.

Now the bad. There are not enough baseball fields, soccer fields, football fields and basketball courts for all of the leagues today. The situation is approaching a crisis as young, new residents buy townhouses, rebuild cape cods and colonials. They bring more children to the area. Look at what this is doing to the enrollment at our schools right now.

Facts are: this spring the SPJ Soccer Association has 2,000 youngsters registered for the various house and travel leagues. The SPJ Youth Baseball Association has almost 1,000 boys and girls registered to "play ball" starting this Saturday. This total does not include the Fanwood little league. The SPJ P.A.L. league had several hundred boys and girls playing football last fall.

The Scotch Plains recreation department averages a few hundred boys and girls from grades three through eight playing basketball every winter. YMCA, P.A.L. and I.H.M. all have basketball leagues. Kids age four can play organized

soccer, kids age five can play organized basketball, and kids age six can play organized football and baseball. This is a great for our youngsters.

Mayor Marks, the township council and the recreation department should be applauded for appropriating monies and setting aside land to construct fields like Memorial Field. I take my son there often and outside of the goose droppings, we like its close proximity to our home. Mayor Marks and the recreation department now want to add more turf and courts. I support them to do so at Brookside Park.

I have spent many afternoons shooting basketball there and often found myself to be the only person on the grounds. During the summer, the field is used for softball, which as I understand the mayor's plan, the fields would be enhanced. In addition, a town recreation center is long overdue and a selling point our community can boast of, not a deterrent.

Our sports associations spend countless hours and dollars to pay for rented fields outside of Scotch Plains so a portion of our youngsters have a place to play. For a town our size and ability, this is absurd. Dr. Choye, Dr. Heisey, and the board of education have been very accommodating in permitting the recreation department and the various associations the usage of their courts and fields.

Drive by Evergreen Elementary School on Saturday morning and look at the hundreds of four to five-year-olds enjoying soccer for the first time. Spend a Sunday afternoon at the high school this September and watch the P.A.L. football leagues in action. Or come visit Park and Terrill Middle Schools next January on a Thursday evening and watch hundreds of elementary - middle schoolers playing competitive basketball. The custodians and staff are patient and a little extra work is created by this. I compliment them often when I see them. We can only pray these fields and courts are ours to use for our children for years to come.

I respect the opinions of my fellow residents who feel the mayor's plan would detract from the Brookside Park area of town. I however disagree. My wife would tell you that when we were looking for homes in the spring of 2001, if it were up to me, we would have bought a house right across Hetfield from Brookside Park that was for sale at the time. My wife overruled me and selected a house on Coles Avenue where we are very happy. Had I known then what I know now that is being considered for Brookside, my residence would be on Hetfield.

Kenneth Miller
Scotch Plains

Brookside Wasn't Held Hostage; Used as Meant

This is in response to Jim Fawcett's comments about "the neighborhood group opposing any Brookside Park expansion" that was "holding the park hostage" on March 11.

I beg to differ, Mr. Fawcett. The neighborhood group met at the park that beautiful Saturday morning to take pictures for a soon-to-be-up-and-running website, SaveBrooksidePark.org.

What turned it into a protest was the apparent clear-cutting of 40 trees from the left field woods.

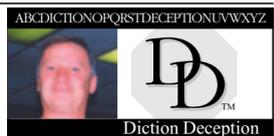
No, the park wasn't being held hostage, it was being used as it was meant to be used, for passive, unstructured recreation. No referees. No umpires.

"Holding the park hostage?" In my opinion, that is what an artificial-turfed, lighted, fenced-in soccer field would do to Brookside Park.

So Mr. Fawcett, I am sorry that you are feeling so "demoralized" and "exhausted" and that you have to drive your daughter to Staten Island to play on a turf field. But as I tell my daughter, "You live with the choices you make."

Here's a better idea. Next Saturday, grab a blanket, a frisbee and a picnic lunch and take your family to Brookside for a picnic.

Cathy Smith
Scotch Plains



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game **Diction Deception**.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Sasin - The Indian antelope or black buck
2. Vatic - Characteristic of a prophet or seer
3. Scaturient - Gushing forth
4. Versute - Crafty

CUIRASS

1. A light, rounded helmet with a visor
2. A breastplate of leather
3. An ancient flask or jug of leather
4. A footprint

TAWIE

1. Formed or made up of mud
2. A looking glass, small telescope
3. Soft sleet or hail
4. Tame

RENIDIFICATION

1. The act of making thin
2. The act of building another nest
3. The use of brushwood and thorns for making and repairing hedges
4. Rapid climate change due to a cataclysmic event

TEMIK

1. An Eskimo coat made of bird skins
2. A deep cut or gash
3. A boat hoisted used for raising and lowering smaller boats
4. A fish net

See More Letters and Candidate Statements on Pages 5, 17 and 18

Letters to the Editor

Secular? Or Hope, Compassion, Charity

I too am deeply offended by your publication of inspirational columns by our local ministers and religious leaders. Who needs periodic reminders of the importance of spirituality and morality in our daily lives?

Can't you devote more space to violent crimes, spiteful neighbors and other byproducts of our secular world? The free and public expression of religion has no historical tradition in this country, does it?

Religious observances and commentary should not be shared, but hidden away, lest their accompanying messages of hope, compassion and charity escape and enter the hearts and minds of those of us, all of us, so desperately in need. Only then will our community become a "better" place.

Sam Della Fera Jr.
Westfield

'You Don't Know What You Got Till it's Gone'

On the front page of the April 6 issue of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, an article titled "Youth Sports Press for More Field Turf, Space and Lights." In that article, Mr. Jim Fawcett, president of the Scotch Plains Fanwood Soccer Association, made a statement "while they were holding the park hostage" - referring to the protest the neighbors surrounding Brookside Park held.

As Mr. Fawcett was not physically at the park, he obviously has received false and misleading information regarding the protest. Where Mr. Fawcett received his information from is unbeknownst to me; nevertheless, the nature of this misrepresentation was surely rooted in rumors, because it was not based on fact.

My property is next to the park, and my family and I were among the neighbors who were at the protest. I have lived in Scotch Plains for over 18 years, and raised two children in the town. My son played on one of the Scotch Plains Fanwood Youth Baseball teams. In short, I have more than a significant interest in what happens in the town and in particular in Brookside Park.

Those of us who were at the protest do not oppose reasonable renovation of the park and fields. We oppose a 30,000 to 40,000 square foot recreational center; artificial turf that has to be fenced and locked; artificial lighting (which does leak into surrounding properties); and cutting down of trees. We also oppose the planned addition of significant numbers of parking spaces, which will result in a substantial increase in traffic and related safety issues and noise.

Brookside Park is the last of its kind in Scotch Plains. It is an amazing combination of wooded areas and open spaces that both children and adults can enjoy. Mr. Fawcett should think about that while "he was driving his daughter to play soccer at a turf field on Staten Island." To quote Joni Mitchell "you don't know what you got till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

Neil Rosoff
Scotch Plains

Littering Must Stop At Mindowaskin Park

We were walking by the creek at Mindowaskin Park and noticed water bottles, plastic bags and candy wrappers scattered everywhere. We tried cleaning them up, but there were too many scraps of garbage for just us to handle. We were especially disturbed when we saw two ducks, that we later named Indigo and Violet, as we were worried that their, and many other creatures', lives may be at stake.

We plan to participate in the Earth Day Mindowaskin Park clean-up on April 29, but we want to do more. The littering must stop. You must help us make the public understand how important it is to care for our environment.

Shea Fitzpatrick, 10
Sarah Drummond, 10
Westfield

Fighting Amongst Ourselves? We're Fighting the Wrong Battle

Rather than school boards and mayors battling with residents over rising property taxes, we believe that it would be more effective (and the right thing to do) for all parties to counterattack and campaign where the bigger part of the problem (and solution) is - fraud and misuse of tax money - such as at UMDNJ, Abbott districts and the widespread patronage throughout county and state government and utilities. Every PTO member, citizen, mayor and school board member should call and write their legislators, governor and freeholders to demand action. We're impressed with the actions of U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie. Let him know of your support.

Municipal, county and public school officials knew that they couldn't count on the state to bail them out of their budget woes. Trenton has more trouble than it can handle. Most voters knew last November that campaign promises by politicians meant little.

State, county, municipalities, utilities and boards of education continue to spend more. Many reasons are cited such as pension and health benefits, sewer fees, unfunded mandates, debt service from borrowing, bankrupt highway and transportation fund, defunct School Construction Corp. and a long list of other fiscal ailments. Now they hope to avoid voter wrath as taxes will continue to rise significantly. Property owners won't know how much their taxes will rise until receiving the notice in August.

There's plenty of posturing over the process while everyone figures out how to deflect the blame.

Governor Jon Corzine unveiled his \$31 billion budget last month that increases Trenton spending by 11 percent and increases taxes on many fronts. Municipal and school aid are being frozen, which increases property taxes too. Are the leaks plugged in the abuse of public funds, double dippers, pay-to-play and political honorarium positions? No.

The legislature will wrestle with the budget until the final hour in June. It will be a battle, but little is possible other than that which the governor proposes unless the public expresses outrage.

The governor plans to increase taxes on nearly everything, including beer and cigarettes. At \$3 tax per pack, the cigarette tax will be the highest in the nation. He also wants to raise the sales tax from 6 to 7 percent. New Jerseyans can travel across state lines to outlet malls in Pennsylvania or to New York City, where Mayor Michael Bloomberg holds "tax free" weeks throughout the year.

The cigarette tax on one hand extends the smoking ban to bars effective this week. That ban, which was signed by Governor Richard Codey, does not include the Atlantic City casinos. While New Jersey politicians say they want to create a smoke-free environment, they also continue to rely on this multi-billion dollar indus-

try as a major revenue generator for the state budget.

The governor's plan to keep the state's Transportation Trust Fund alive come July has come under fire. Like his predecessors, Governor Corzine is borrowing his way out of this mess - mortgaging the future. The legislation passed both houses and was signed into law by the governor. The legislation allows the state to increase the fund's annual debt limit from \$650 million to \$1.6 billion. The state would be able to issue 35-year bonds instead of the current 20-year maximum. We believe this is dreadful.

Is the state doing all it can to cut the fat out of the budget? Are bills that increase spending being rejected? Is there an effort to reduce unfunded state mandates on local school boards and municipal governments? Are our legislators stopping the abuses of officials and patrons receiving big pay hikes to boost their pensions, i.e., Robert Codey's employment with the Union County Prosecutor's Office, or the huge increase in pay for the new Elizabeth superintendent of schools, or Mayor Sharpe James funneling \$80 million to a trust fund, which he set himself up to administer for life, or ending the failed Abbott Schools Program? And we never did find out about the \$45 million discovered in an unknown Linden account when former Sen. Joseph Sulliga and City Treasurer died in an accident at a go-go joint.

State legislators, freeholders, mayors and school board members tell us it's going to be bloody out there over the next few months. Even still, as they admit this terrible mess, all still increase spending and demand more from the taxpayer.

The full cumulative impact of all these tax increases will not be felt until August. Here is the timeline:

Tuesday, April 18 - Residents will first see the impact of tax hikes when they vote on school budgets.

Late spring - Union County and municipal budgets will be adopted.

Friday, June 30 - The state budget is approved by the State Legislature and signed by the July 1 Constitutional deadline.

Tuesday, August 1 - First quarter property taxes are due. The ramifications of fee increases, higher sales and real estate capital gains taxes and shrinking rebates will take a little longer to be felt.

In reality, we're all to blame. We hide while turning our backs on malfeasance and corruption.

Naturally, the governor and other officials are painting this in the best light they can - and it's not good. So, in the true light, how bad is it?

Next week, when school budgets go to the voters, everyone wonders what message will be sent, if any.

If we're fighting amongst ourselves, we're fighting the wrong battle.

Preserve Brookside Park's Natural Beauty for Everyone; Don't Cut the Trees, Turf it and Destroy the Wildlife

It was with interest, which quickly turned to surprise, that I read the quotes from Jim Fawcett, president of the SPJ Soccer Association in the April 6 issue of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. The front page article was titled "Youth Sports Press for More Field Turf, Space and Lights."

Mr. Fawcett was quoted as saying: "while they (Friends of Brookside Park Group) were holding the park hostage," he was driving his daughter to play soccer at a turf field on Staten Island. The only true statement in that quote was that he drove his daughter to play soccer.

Yes, we held a rally for the Friends of Brookside Park Group in the park on March 11. Approximately 100 adults and children attended the rally. Our goal was to draw attention to the proposal to build a recreation complex at Brookside Park. The park was not held hostage and everyone was free to use it.

Yes, the baseball field was being used by a handful of five and six-year-olds who were running around the bases. If any scheduled group had shown up to use the field, the parents would have gladly directed their children to the playground where the majority of them were already playing.

Were the six-year-olds the ones holding the park hostage since they were playing on the baseball field?

Contrary to Mr. Fawcett's statement, the Friends of Brookside Park do not oppose the building of additional ball fields at suitable locations. In fact, I am not aware of a single person who opposes the building of new ball fields. Finding suitable locations is the key issue.

We are opposed to the cutting down of 300-400 trees in Brookside Park to squeeze in a fenced, lighted, artificial turf soccer field. We are opposed to moving thousands of cubic yards of dirt to flatten the picnic area so that the baseball field can be relocated to that area. We do not want to see a 44,000 square foot building put in the park along with a 216-space parking lot. We do want to see open space funds spent to upgrade the existing field and facilities.

We believe that the park is being underutilized and that by upgrading the existing facilities, youth soccer and baseball teams and the residents of Scotch Plains will be encouraged to make better use of the field and park.

It is The Friends of Brookside Park position that Brookside Park and Wildlife Preserve is the only undisturbed natural location owned by the town. The surrounding woods and pond provide a peaceful natural habitat that is home to a variety of species. The park's jungle gym, walk-

ing trails, sleighing hill and open grasslands provide a free and unstructured atmosphere for passive recreation by both the adults and children in the neighborhood and community at large.

The clear cutting of hundreds of mature trees to install an artificial turf field, recreation center, and parking lot is unconscionable. Mr. Fawcett made reference to Houlihan Field in Westfield as something to strive for. Please note that these soccer fields were not built in the middle of Brightwood Park as proposed about seven years ago, nor were they built on any of the many wooded acres in Tamaques Park.

Westfield found suitable land, which did not require the destruction of wooded parkland. Let's hope the residents and governing bodies in Scotch Plains have the same concern for their park land as those in Westfield.

In summary, please feel free to keep up the clever little remarks aimed at your fellow residents in their efforts to protect the park. Recent posting on your association's web site

(www.scotchplainsfanwoodsoccer.com) titled "Plans for New Soccer Field Unveiled", complete with a picture of a field "smartly sensitive to natural setting" was very amusing. Good to see that you still have a sense of humor despite saying it was "demoralizing" and "exhausting" to be "spending so much fee time serving the youth of our towns" and then fighting people who are opposed to new ball fields. Again, misrepresenting our rally as taking the park hostage and misrepresenting our position with regard to building new ball fields in town was disingenuous and will never go unchallenged.

Let's work together to try and identify suitable locations where new fields can be built for the benefit of all residents. The support of the entire town is needed to tackle this issue since the cost will be borne by all Scotch Plains taxpayers and because all citizens have a vested interest in preserving our parkland.

Stephen McNally
Scotch Plains

