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Letters to the Editor

WHS Principal Robert Petix Writes of Freedom of Speech

I want to thank Meghan Gill for contacting me for my reaction to being censored at the Board of Education meeting on May 16. Her subsequent article in *The Westfield Leader* of May 25 highlights an issue of concern to high school teachers, administrators and parents interested in preserving the quality of this institution: the replacement of the position of 9-12 department chairs in academic departments at Westfield High School with K-12 and 6-12 supervisors.

The retirement of World Languages Department Chair, Dr. Suzanne Jacobus, has given the superintendent a reason to economize at the expense of quality. Much to the chagrin of the Westfield High School World Languages teachers, the superintendent has eliminated Dr. Jacobus' position and has expanded the duties of the current K-8 World Languages supervisor to include the high school.

Unfortunately, similar changes made in the Social Studies and Mathematics Departments have already negatively affected the quality of those programs at this level.

When I tried to explain this problem publicly, Board of Education President Anne Riegel tried three times to silence me, saying it was a "personnel matter." Clearly, it was not. I will be happy to send the full text of my remarks to anyone interested in reading them, rpexit@westfieldnj12.org.

Here is a portion of what I tried to say: "The K-12 and 6-12 models have been tried and do not work at Westfield High School. K-12 and 6-12 supervisors are overextended. Teachers at the high school working under K-12 and 6-12 supervisors are underserved. Teachers who have worked in academic departments under the 9-12 model enthusiastically endorse it because in-house department chairs provide proper supervision. Those who have then worked under the other models (K-12 or 6-12) have received less supervision, much less personal support, and limited contact with their supervisors.

Teachers feel insufficiently supervised and assisted. Small problems that could be easily resolved become significant causes of concern. Important questions about lesson plans, teaching strategies and classroom management go unanswered for long periods of time. The supervisors are simply not there when needed.

The high school administration can not find them either. Telephone calls made to these central office based supervisors to resolve departmental or school-wide issues are not answered for hours and sometimes not for days. These district wide supervisors are working, but their assignments elsewhere prevent their timely response to problems at Westfield High School.

"The people are not the problem; the model under which they work is the problem: supervisors spread too thin; teachers underserved. The Westfield High School administration believes our teachers deserve better. The WEA president believes our teachers deserve better. The WEA president has appealed to the superintendent for years to restore 9-12 supervisors

at the high school. He has said that high school teachers need strong academic supervisors who are based in the building. How ironic: teachers and the Teachers Association are asking for more supervision; the administration and Board of Education want to offer less.

"High school teachers also need to see that their supervisors can, themselves, teach effectively. The 'hit and run model' in which supervisors come to the building, observe classes, have a post conference and leave makes them much less credible to their teachers than teaching supervisors who are in the classroom with their own students everyday. Supervisors who are also teachers experience first hand the subtle changes in students' learning that occur every year. A supervisor who has not been in the classroom for several years knows the mechanics of instruction, not the students."

The President of the Westfield Education Association, as well as the Westfield High School Principal of 26 years, has appealed to Dr. Foley many times, arguing that the Department Chair model best serves this high school. Dr. Foley's assertion that a new principal will somehow have the power to change the superintendent's perspective on the supervisory configuration is farfetched.

The fact is the superintendent is already planning to make a similar change in Science. The detrimental effects of the K-12 and 6-12 supervisory models in Social Studies and Mathematics are increasingly apparent at Westfield High School. Without a department chair, the World Languages program will be the next to suffer. The die is cast; Westfield High School loses.

I heartily agree with Dr. Foley that district needs K-12 coordination. Although he and I have had one short informal conversation about one of my proposals on how that coordination could occur without eliminating department chairs at the high school, his promise to give me the opportunity to explain all my ideas more fully has not been kept.

In my opinion, the elimination of department chairs in two academic departments has already sown the seeds of mediocrity at this high school. Eliminating the chair positions now in World Languages and soon in Science, will continue an unnecessary trend towards mediocrity.

Ms. Gill's original issue, censorship, should not be forgotten. The fact is I was censored at a public meeting because the Board of Education did not like what I was saying. The censorship of ideas by any public body should be a concern to all Westfielders.

With my departure as principal, Westfield High School students are worried that the seven decade tradition of producing the *Hi's Eye* as an uncensored source of news at Westfield High School may be in jeopardy. Based on my personal experience at the Board of Education meeting, the students should be worried.

Robert G. Petix
Principal
Westfield High School



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. Mazama - The Rocky Mountain goat

2. Stercoraceous - Having the nature of feces
3. Jacare - A Brazilian alligator
4. Arcration - Contraction of a natural opening

ECHINODERMATOUS
1. Having the characteristics of spines
2. Covered with warts or moles
3. Ossified; bony
4. Leathery or toughened outer surface

VARAN
1. A Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American unit of linear measure
2. The monitor lizard
3. A small pit or dent in the skin
4. A scar

IRIDEREMIA
1. Total absence of sunlight
2. Absence of pigment in the skin
3. Partial or total absence of the iris
4. Discontent

TROIKA
1. An astringent or repellent
2. A short, thick stick of wood used as a weapon
3. A hut built on stilts by the Tartars
4. A carriage drawn by three horses abreast

Thank You Westfield Good Samaritans

To the Westfield community: I would like to thank the good Samaritans who helped me when I fell in town on May 24.

I only got the names of Andrew and Meg, however, I am grateful to each and every one of you who displayed all of your concern and kindness. My sincere thanks.

Arlene Murray
Lavallette

Florida Reader Recalls Editor Gail Trimble

We are still in Florida and look forward to getting *The Leader* here and keeping up with what's happening there. Just received the issue of *The Leader*, which included: "This Is Westfield" and feel compelled to congratulate you all for an excellent edition.

Many years ago, I worked closely with Gail Trimble, then editor, and several subsequent editors on this special publication. It used to come out in April before the school election, which was quite frustrating. So, I am pleased to see that it is being published later with current school board information.

Having the school superintendent and the mayor write items is another excellent idea. The current edition is crisp and clean, very readable and very informative. All in all, it's a job well done and well deserving of praise and the appreciation of readers.

Maggie Cimei
Bonita Springs, FL and Westfield
Former Resident, Class Of '54, Recollects

Who destroyed my hometown? I have just returned from a trip to my old hometown of Westfield, N.J. I have not been in Westfield for several years. Twenty years to be exact. I was shocked at the change - from historic Westfield to corporate glitz. The big "W" flags heralding the conquest of hometown businesses defeated by "corporate greedies."

Perhaps Westfield, like so many other towns, was dying a slow death because of big box stores and malls, but the humiliation of being morphed into a mall itself is just plain regrettable. Political cowards and corporate greed are comfortable as bedfellows, enjoying their pleasures at the expense of common folks. What lackey thought it would be a good idea to cover the limestone of the Westfield Trust Co. with cheap paint?

Parking has always been a problem in Westfield. Now, while waiting for traffic to move, you get out of your car, buy a fancy bra for your wife, and then run across the street and get something for the kids. Think of it as valet parking without the valet.

If you don't have any shopping to do, you can always enjoy the breeze fluttering those "W" flags letting you know the "W" is for wrong! Not Westfield, as I knew it. Sincerely and nostalgically yours.

Nicholas Canigula
Class of '54'
Templeton, California

WF Mom Shocked by School Changes

Editor's note: This letter was sent to the Superintendent of Westfield Schools and copied to this newspaper.

Dear Dr. Foley,
I am shocked and horrified at what you have done to Washington School. In regard to your e-mail sent out notifying us of the change in principals, I am not clear on how you can correlate dealing with young hearts and minds to corporate America.

You have no right to disrupt our children's sense of security and stability to right the wrongs of one. Do you not think that we have enough going on at Washington with the redistricting issue and the centralized kindergarten to now change our principal?

In addition, there will be a learning curve issue that comes along with a new principal.

It is just wrong and heartless. We are not a corporation, we are a community of young families that want the best for our young children - and this change is not it!

Kelly Harrington
Washington School Mom
Westfield

Exercise Your Rights; It Honors Those Who Served Democracy

The Memorial Day parades in Westfield and Scotch Plains were stirring, great traditions filled with deep heart-felt meaning. Thousands marched, spoke and lined the streets. For those attending one of these events, a feeling of pride and gratitude was certainly a first thought - it's about remembering those who served, making everything possible that we have today.

As times change, veterans die, new soldiers serve and regrettably, new wars arise. We wonder about the meaning of this - and about how we can practice in our daily lives the profound lessons this foretells.

Perhaps one way to honor those that have sacrificed is to ask what is the legacy they leave with us. One answer might be the blessing of democracy that they made possible and that they guard today. It's something in our everyday life we may take for granted - worse yet, something that we don't know exists, or forget. So practicing democracy and exercising your rights honors all that have served. Certainly, the results of your citizenship will be a positive factor in your quality of life.

But, what are specific examples for citizens to follow? Some were brought to mind by those asking questions of us; people highly informed, but perhaps very busy. The questions amounted to "how can I find out more about what is going on in government - the county, the town and the school system? Can I get detailed information of budgets, minutes, salaries and pensions - information other than that just sent in press releases?" The most disturbing follow up to the question was, "Am I entitled to the informa-

tion and will there be reprisals if I seek it?"

Our answer is that you are the government in democracy, and those that are elected or hired do so at your consent. They work for you. Politicians aren't entitled to win and accumulate power to the point that democracy and your rights are circumvented.

To understand some of these points as written in legislation, please read the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). We've posted these at goleader.com/features.

These laws clearly tell of your right to know. You are entitled to records of most anything such as all the salaries, pensions and benefits of those in the school system or working for the county. Don't be intimidated - be forceful, yet courteous and practice democracy. Obtain the information you seek from government, bureaucrats and elected officials. Attend meetings. Insist that agencies, authorities and all such bodies act in accordance with the laws and principles of democracy.

One thing that we have found is that many in government hope for citizens to exercise their rights as this breaks up the power blocks that shackle public servants.

You might be surprised that democracy exists and that you can drag those that believe that they control you across the line to realizing that they instead work for you.

Exercise your rights and maintain democracy. It honors those that have served and died to preserve this blessing.

Letters to the Editor

Westfielder Dismayed About New Principal Assignments

Editor's Note: This letter was sent to the Westfield Board of Education and copied to this newspaper.

I am writing regarding the bizarre decision this week by Superintendent William Foley to flip-flop the two elementary school principals at Washington School and Wilson School. It was with great dismay that the school community read the announcement of the proposed switch in which Dr. Foley rationalized that "change is good" and it is the way corporate America handles leadership decisions.

In fact, many members of the Westfield community are leaders in corporate America; those individuals would not hold their jobs for five minutes if they pranced around announcing leadership changes on the flimsy rationale that "change is good."

It is time for the members of the school board to demand the facts from Dr. Foley. This is a school district that needs to base its personnel decisions on performance and not on Dr. Foley's notion of old corporate adages. These two principals are beloved by their respective school communities and have demonstrated over many years that they are talented, dedicated professionals who have improved their schools and have continually introduced cutting edge ideas in elementary education.

As a parent who has had four children attend Wilson School over the last 13 years, I have been in awe of Dr. Perry's unsurpassed dedication and the professional attitude with which he treats his staff, students and parents. He is a quintessential professional who demands the best of himself, his staff and his students. He is committed to creating a partnership between teacher, student and parent. It is

this philosophy that has made the Wilson community not only a place of great achievement but, more importantly, a place of tremendous spirit and camaraderie.

He has also been a loyal soldier as he has adapted to the disastrous district-imposed Everyday Math program and the more recent Spelling-By-Osmosis program.

Andy Perry is the heart and soul of Wilson School. Through many national crises, Dr. Perry has led the Wilson School community with a sense of compassion and understanding. More importantly, he has modeled behavior in which he faces crisis with a sense of calm and control. Our children see a future that is bright with promise because Andy Perry is a leader who conveys that message with assurance and dignity.

During all his years at Wilson School, Dr. Perry has not lost the personal touch. Everyday he stands outside an overcrowded school surrounded by four narrow streets ensuring the safety of students as they are dropped off and picked up at school. It is this informal day-to-day contact that separates Dr. Perry from a school administrator that seems increasingly removed from its constituency with every decision it makes. It is an administration that became so estranged from its populace that it failed to pass its budget in 2005. And now, in some bizarre act under the guise of corporate mimicry, it has decided to alienate two school communities with a combined population of almost 1000 students. Many of the parents of those very students spent months trying to develop support for an isolated school administration so that the 2006 budget

would pass. Be assured those same members of this school community will not forget Dr. Foley's latest lack of leadership.

To further alienate the school community with his principal flip-flop, Dr. Foley has announced that a new assistant principal role will be created and filled at Wilson School. This means a job that was performed previously by one principal will now require a principal and an assistant principal. This is the kind of waste that will ensure hordes of "no" votes on budget day. In a school district that continually faces resource shortages, voters will not miss the fact that Dr. Foley is adding an extra administrator to Wilson School to perform a job that was handled adeptly by one individual for the last 16 years.

If the members of the Westfield School Board support Dr. Foley's rationale that "change in leadership is good" perhaps it is time to look at the most senior leader in this district. It is his decision on the principal flip-flop, made presumably in isolation, that will de-stabilize the faculty of two elementary schools, disillusion the parent/voter community and, most unsettling, harm our children.

I strongly urge you to exercise your prerogative as an effective oversight board and reverse Dr. Foley's latest flip-flop decision before the two elementary schools are left in complete disarray. At the very least, I urge you to investigate the facts to ensure that major personnel decisions are not being made based on Dr. Foley's old wives' tales about the "need for change."

Deborah Montick
Westfield

Parents Question Switching Wilson And Washington School Principals

It was with great surprise that we received a letter from Dr. Foley, Westfield Superintendent of Schools, advising that the Washington Elementary School principal and the Wilson Elementary School principal would be "switched" starting with the 2006-2007 school year.

More curious was the reasoning set forth by Dr. Foley who notes his belief that schools and leaders benefit from changes in leadership from time to time. By analogy, Dr. Foley reasons that "[i]n the business world, changes in leadership are routine as companies try to redefine their mission and become more competitive."

We are not aware of any successful organization that has changed a successful CEO simply for the sake of change. Nor are we aware that Washington School is a school in need of a new mission. In fact, we strongly believe that the mission we perceive Mr. Malanga to be on - that is to provide a superior education in a caring and personal manner to each child who walks the halls of Washington School - is exactly what is needed for our children. Let's not change that simply for the sake of change.

We are asking Dr. Foley to please listen to the parents on this one. Mr.

Westfield Resident Stunned Over McMansion Inaction by Planning Bd.

I am frankly stunned that the Town Planning Board so roundly rejected the proposed ordinance attempting to put some reasonable restraint on development in Westfield. This issue has only grown over the time we as a town have been "thinking about it," - and the evidence is quite clear that the longer we delay, the worse the problem and the more it is a *fait accompli*.

The local architect's comments in particular are blatantly self-serving, and *The Leader's* use of the word "explained" in reference to them - "the draft ordinance would limit options, decrease values and affect the economy negatively" - is an unwarranted assumption akin to those

Westfield 3rd Grader Praises Her Principal

Editor's Note: This letter was sent to members of the Westfield Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools plus copied to this newspaper.

I am upset that Mr. Malanga is going to Wilson School. I've had Mr. Malanga as my principal all my life and he is a great, kind, and fun principal. Mr. Malanga is a really special person in our school, and he holds us all together just like a puzzle.

You could just say that Mr. Malanga is the leader of the pack and leads us through the years. He makes us feel we are all part of a team. Please keep him at Washington School.

Meghan Pettit
Westfield
3rd Grade at Washington School

Malanga has fostered relationships with his many constituencies - the children, the parents, the teachers and the greater community that is Washington School. The school district has been progressively improving the education process. Just one example of this is the concept of differentiated teaching that involves modifying the teaching approach to best teach to the abilities of each child.

An elementary school principal is one of the few constants as a child progresses from kindergarten through fifth grade and having a principal who knows the children well enhances the placement of students with the most appropriate teacher.

Mr. Malanga already has years of knowledge with respect to Washington School students, as does Dr. Perry for Wilson School, which will be lost simply for the sake of change. Dr. Foley points out that both of these principals are capable of leading a school to success. But if we are doing this simply to make a change, please reconsider this decision.

In any event, please reach out to the community in the future when making a decision of this magnitude that impacts our children's education.

Rich and Michelle Mattessich
Westfield

frequently made by Fox News.

He is entitled to his opinions, but they are opinions and there are significant rebuttals.

Many Westfield residents, including virtually everyone I've spoken to on the topic, feel differently. We see Westfield taking on the characteristics of so many newer developments in outlying areas: cookie-cutter homes, grossly oversized and energy-inefficient, taking over beautiful old neighborhoods.

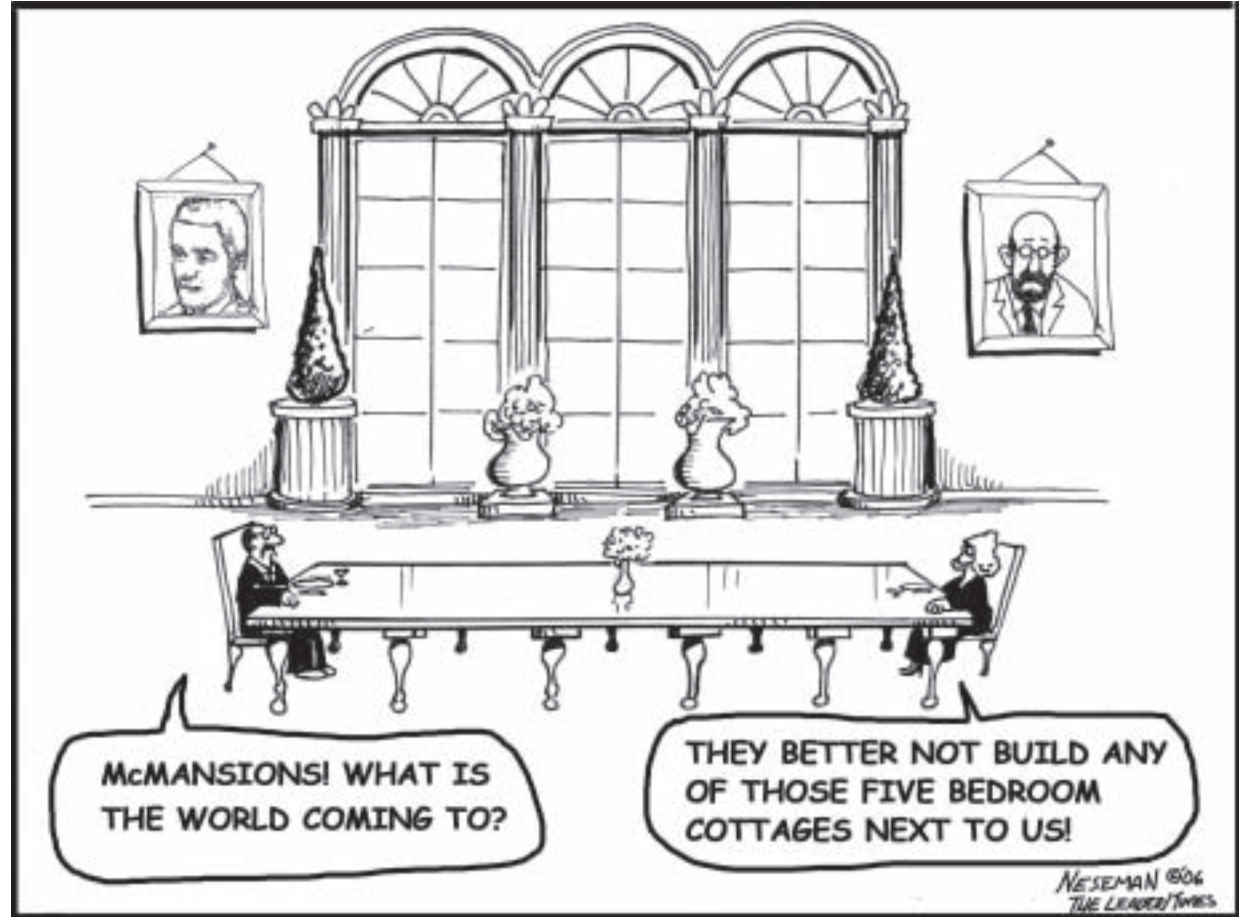
While we do enjoy great schools and relatively easy access to New York, one is tempted to ask those building and occupying these monstrosities why they don't simply settle in an area where this type and scale of home are both already prevalent and appropriate to the size of the lots.

The more we take on the appearance of a new development, the less we enjoy the distinctive character of our town. And in addition to the aesthetic issues, this is bound to eventually affect our home values as well.

Freedom always implies conflict, in this case, the conflict between the right of owners to construct their homes as they see fit and of other owners not to have their landscape blighted and property values eventually destroyed. Most of us chose to live here, at least in part, because this is a special town.

McMansions threaten everything that makes Westfield what it is. I urge the Town Planning Board to keep this issue as priority one and not let it be decided by a lack of action.

Travis Hudelson
Westfield



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