

By WF-BOE Candidate Doug Stokes I Know Schools, How They Operate

I have had the pleasure of meeting many Westfield residents since I declared my candidacy for the Westfield Board of Education. I am impressed by the value that many residents place on education and their desire to provide the children of Westfield with the best opportunities available. I am often asked what makes me stand apart from the other candidates. What makes Doug Stokes a "valuable addition" to the Board of Education?

I know schools and how they operate. As a Curriculum Resource Teacher in a district that has 17 schools (11 elementary, 4 middle and 2 high schools), I assist in district curriculum development, modification projects, lead professional development workshops that promote effective curriculum implementation, and provide classroom demonstration lessons to model innovative teaching techniques and strategies that align with the NJ Core Curriculum Standards and other federal/state mandated programs. The nature and scope of my position has expanded my own understanding of the daily operations of schools from a local and district wide perspective.

I will bring a strong, knowledgeable voice to the Westfield BOE that has valuable insight into:

Curriculum: I work with all levels of district personnel, often in vertical teams (professionals from elementary, middle and high school meet together), to create/modify curricula that meets the needs of all learners, is challenging and prepares students for the future.

Budgets: All districts are faced with the task of generating a fiscally sound budget that gives children the quality education that they deserve and taxpayers the sense of value that they want. I can offer my knowledge of budget development and hopefully create some new ways to save money, without impeding the quality education that is being delivered.

Overcrowding and Class Size: Overcrowding is a major concern. High student to teacher ratios is another, yet they go hand in hand. Through my experience as an educator in a public school system, I have witnessed first hand the impact that large class sizes have on instruction, student learning and the school community as a whole.

Adding on to schools by taking a bond out for school construction would not be prudent at this time, since the cost to the taxpayer would be huge. Moreover, with the financial instability facing the SCC (School Construction Corporation), I am not even sure if the state can offset a good portion of the cost, like they have done in the past.

Research has shown that there is no one way for districts to properly handle this issue. Each district has a "unique situation" based on population, building conditions, extent and duration of the projected numbers, neighborhood schools and so on. It is a very sensitive issue, that needs a carefully thought out solution.

However, getting all constituents involved in creating a solution is the key to addressing the issue. Westfield did this by forming the CACE committee. Through parent surveys, meetings and discussions, the committee has made it a point to get as much input as possible from all stakeholders in town. The committee will soon be sharing its findings with the board. I look forward to hearing and having input on the CACE committee's findings and recommendations.

Questioning: One of the keys to learning is the ability to question. The key to a well-run organization is the ability to ask the difficult questions of those who make the decisions. The Superintendent and BOE have a good working relationship when it comes to making educational decisions for the Westfield Schools and its students. At times, it may be necessary to question the effectiveness, prudence and impact of certain decisions and policies.

My keen insight and perspective into the operations of schools will allow me to work as a fellow team member, but will also enable me to ask the difficult questions of the superintendent and fellow members of the BOE. Think progress. Believe in progress. Push for progress.

Children: All decisions should be about the children of Westfield. I want the best opportunities for our children. I will use my knowledge and experience to provide an exceptional education for all.

Thanks for your support of our schools. If you have any thoughts, comments or concerns, please e-mail me at stokesix@verizon.net.

By WF-BOE Candidate Jesse Garfinkel Bridge the Gap: Citizens and Students

I have lived in Westfield for my entire life — 18 years. A student at Westfield High School, I have dedicated much of my educational experience to honing my voice as a student-leader.

I believe in the vital commitment of working with people of all ideologies in order to solve problems. I also believe that academic excellence is the most important element of an education. I am a member of the Westfield chapter of the National Honor Society, earning a Letter of Commendation from the National Merit Scholarship program. I was also named an Edward J. Bloustein Distinguished Scholar by the state of New Jersey.

I serve as president of the school's largest club, the Model UN, receiving awards for my work as a delegate and officer. I am a member of the Governor's cabinet in the NJ Youth & Government program and also compete as a member of the WHS Quiz Bowl Team.

Enjoying many sports, I play varsity

lacrosse in the spring. I also have a love of music and play the guitar in a band called "The Great Schism." My two sisters, Ariel 20, a sophomore at Bates College, and Daryl, 14, a freshman at WHS, have been very influential in my life. I also have two cousins in the district, a third grader, Alex, at Washington, and a sixth grader, Ilana, at Roosevelt.

I am committed to pursuing a career in public service and believe that I can make a positive impact right now in my hometown.

Through involvement in many different extra-curricular and community programs, I have met many articulate and intelligent people of all ages. They are my inspiration for running for the board of education. We need to bridge the gap between the hard-working citizens of today and our students of tomorrow. Through providing a new perspective to the board, I believe that I can help facilitate this important and beneficial change.

NJ State Aid for School Districts

TRENTON — The New Jersey Department of Education has published state education aid figures for this coming year for the 595 school districts. The aid totals \$7 billion. The total and the distribution are largely unchanged compared to last year.

Ed. Aid to Union County

Elizabeth	\$259,072,098
Plainfield	\$99,967,767
Union	\$23,724,775
Roselle	\$17,639,821
Linden	\$17,376,462
Hillside	\$16,400,075
Rahway	\$15,506,197
Roselle Park	\$7,950,220
Westfield	\$4,563,677
SP-FW	\$4,116,794
UC VoTech	\$3,312,012
Cranford	\$2,741,696
Summit	\$2,271,538
Kenilworth	\$2,066,465
Berkeley Hts.	\$1,856,927
Clark	\$1,616,352
Winfield	\$1,518,035
Springfield	\$1,461,640
New Providence	\$1,435,730
Mountainside	\$586,903
Garwood	\$533,089

Top State Ed. Aid Recipients

Newark City	\$698,818,000
Jersey City	\$430,410,000
Paterson City	\$388,646,000
Elizabeth City	\$259,072,098
Camden City	\$249,599,088
Trenton City	\$217,671,873
East Orange	\$169,691,706
Passaic City	\$161,715,139
Vineland City	\$128,679,814
Union City	\$126,134,409
Irvington	\$110,215,311
Perth Amboy	\$104,186,791
Plainfield	\$99,967,767
New Brunswick	\$91,671,292
Pemberton Twp	\$79,905,456
West New York	\$77,802,375
Toms River	\$68,480,712
Millville City	\$65,672,238
Pleasantville	\$65,374,586
City of Orange	\$61,447,506
Asbury Park	\$58,709,576
Bridgeton City	\$56,980,325
Hamilton Twp	\$56,429,430
Wash. Twp	\$51,635,818
Jackson Twp	\$48,821,172

A spreadsheet of the complete list can be downloaded at: www.goleader.com/features

By SPF-BOE Candidate David Gorbunoff Team With Other Towns, Save Money

After attending the school board budget presentation, it was apparent that there is a need for greater efficiency. It was made clear that 7 percent of our school budget is listed as "other." This category includes areas such as insurance costs, supplies, support services and energy. I believe we could be more efficient with spending in these areas. We should explore the possibility of teaming arrangements with our township as well as neighboring towns and school districts. This could lead to cost reductions for supplies as well as services.

In addition, we must look for alternate revenue sources, which do not further burden our taxpayers. Government and corporate grant programs are available that provide funds to school districts. While our district might not qualify for the highest level of funding, we should benefit from any funds that are available. This should be a priority for our schools.

We must also turn our attention to long-term planning. At the budget presentation at McGinn School, the topic of class size was discussed. It was stated that the next class for first grade is expected to be quite large. We estimate that there will be 100 more first graders next year than there were high school seniors this year.

If this trend continues, we have to make provisions to accommodate this growth in order to keep class sizes at an acceptable level.

We would have to look at our facilities and make plans accordingly. The fear is that the high school especially would be overcrowded. Several years ago, as a concerned parent, I attended a long-range planning conference at McGinn School. I found this forum to be very informative and useful for our district. One of the action items that came out of the conference was the idea to expand the middle schools and move the fifth grade there. This plan was implemented and I believe very successfully. Our middle son was in the first fifth grade at Terrill.

Overcrowding at the elementary and middle school levels has been addressed. Now it is time for another conference. The agenda should look at facilities once again, especially the high school. With careful planning, we will be ready to face the challenges of the future and provide thorough and efficient education for the students of the SP-F school district.

See More Letters and Candidate Releases on Pages 17, 18 and 20

We in the Legislature Must Counter Attack this Monster Government

New Jerseyans and Americans have traditionally been extremely proud of their government and have been educated to respect our governor and the institution of the legislature. It is extremely important that the next generation maintain the same level of respect.

All of our citizens would like to concentrate on their daily lives and trust that their elected officials will handle the business of managing government in an efficient and sensible manner. I truly believe that most elected officials would like to meet the expectations of the electorate, but unfortunately the growth of government has created an "inefficient, complicated, unregulated, and expanding monster." If a business entity in the private sector performed in such a manner, angry shareholders would demand reform.

We must begin the counter attack on this expanding monster with aggressive outside performance and financial audits. Presently, the government audits itself, and the governor's annual message relies solely on internal reviews. If this was an efficient way of monitoring performance, why did we not learn of mismanagement in the school construction fund until it ran out of money? Why were alarms not sounded earlier about the transportation trust fund? What lurks below the surface as this monster grows larger?

I have proposed legislation that requires unannounced performance audits by outside accounting firms. Specifically, all departments, agencies and legislative offices, will be subject to unannounced performance audits. Any and all public entities, even on Fridays at 4 p.m., should be prepared to have someone walk through the door to monitor the work being done on behalf of the public.

The legislation also requires that all public funds, i.e. the pension fund, the school construction fund, the transportation trust fund, all be audited by outside

companies.

Reports on a quarterly basis must be generated and made public immediately before any politician can spin the release.

The UMDNJ situation now requires the supervision of a federal monitor and accounting firms. They are investigating the abuses that have occurred over many years. We must not wait any longer to begin to audit other state entities.

In your own home, because of a very busy schedule, you probably spend more money than you should on phone, computer and grocery bills. Multiply that inefficiency by 30 billion, unlimited borrowing and no fear of bankruptcy and this should provide insight into New Jersey government.

Pension reform is also necessary. There is no justifiable reason for a person to earn \$2,000 a year for 17 years and then have their pension be based on their final three years, if they obtained a position earning \$170,000.

Local governments are sometimes more responsive to citizens concerns. Anyone can stand before the governing bodies and ask questions on any topic, including expenditures. Citizens are not permitted to speak before the legislature and may not ask questions. I have offered a change in the rules to allow citizens, at least once a year, an opportunity to speak before the state legislature.

The citizens of New Jersey are charitable and fair. We are all willing to pay our fair share of taxes. We expect government to be efficient and responsive. We need outside audits of government to report to us, the shareholders.

Government must accept the monitoring now, and I have introduced bills that begin the process. I am working with both sides of the aisle to move the economic swat team legislation forward.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick
Westfield

By WF-BOE Candidate Jane Clancy

Small Class Sizes, More Instruction

How important is class size? Class size is a critical component to a quality educational program. In recent years, the movement across the country has been to lower class sizes. The National Education Association recommends a class size of 15 at the elementary school level. The New Jersey state average is 19, with Westfield running slightly higher at 20. Smaller class sizes enable teachers to spend more time on instruction and less time on classroom management. Studies have shown that student achievements increase and disciplinary problems decrease in a smaller classroom environment.

Education today is designed to allow individual children to achieve to their highest potential. Not only is a small class size

beneficial to the students, it is also beneficial to the teachers. With less time spent on classroom management, studies have shown that teacher morale is improved and higher teacher retention is achieved.

Of course class size alone does not ensure the best education; other critical components are necessary as well. Quality teachers and school leadership, an excellent curriculum, and parental involvement are important as well. It is all of these components put together that create the most successful educational experience for our children.

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