

Politics Takes Back Seat to Education on Westfield BOE

By SARAH McGRAIL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Politics takes a back seat when it comes to providing the best possible education for Westfield students, according to the town's superintendent of schools.

"It has always been my experience that the focus has been on the children," Superintendent Margaret Dolan, Ed.D., told the board of education this week.

"We don't have time, in my view, for politics, and I don't know what political party the board members I have worked with over the years are from because that's not what we do. We are focused on providing the best

programs, the best curriculum, the best staff for our students," she said.

Superintendent Dolan was speaking during a training session for board members following this week's meeting of the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), which aims to help school boards operate efficiently and ethically.

NJSBA representative Gwen Thornton told the board, "Decisions that are best for the students can look dramatically different sometimes to what is in the interests of governmental bodies."

Ms. Thornton also warned of the dangers of board members getting involved in social media discussions

because it was a "no-win situation."

Former board president Gretchan Ohlig said the board had a practice that members not reply on a social media platform and that the board president should be the only person who replied to emails addressed to the board.

"It is too easy to get sucked in on Facebook," she said.

Board member Brendan Galligan added, "Westfield has a Facebook group with around 13,000 members, so things quickly get out of hand."

Ms. Thornton said, "We have national evidence that you are not going to reel it back in. It just turns into this contest of going back and forth and back and forth. I understand that you read things that are inaccurate or untrue, but you are never going to win that sort of contest."

During a very short board meeting, members heard that work was due to start soon on the renovation of Kehler Stadium, and that the bleachers, the item with the longest lead time, had already been ordered, with an expected delivery date in April.

Work will start on the Rahway Avenue side of the stadium, with temporary fencing erected, and board members were assured that the impact on nearby Lincoln School would be minimal.

The builder had been asked to produce details of costs that had increased due to the delay in starting the project caused by a legal case brought against the board by a company which submitted an unsuccessful tender.

Westfield residents will be asked about recreation in the town, with two surveys due to come out in the near future – one about the use of parks and fields, the other regarding the ice rink currently situated on South Chestnut Avenue.

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REMEMBERING DR. KING...Clergy, school and political leaders including Congressman Tom Malinowski (D-7th, Somerville), pictured, second from left in front row, and Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan, Ed.D., second from left, second row, participate in Westfield's 32nd annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. commemoration service Monday at the First Congregational Church in Westfield. The service featured music by the Dr. King Interfaith Choir.

RVSA Suit Progresses, Budget is Finalized

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

RAHWAY — The Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority's (RVSA) January meeting was held last Thursday. The board of commissioners heard about minor developments in its suit against New Jersey and approved a revised budget for 2019. Excess flow hearings with two member municipalities have been delayed due to questions raised by one of the municipalities.

In the RVSA versus New Jersey case, the state was required to submit its response to the order to show cause by January 15, and it did so. RVSA is reviewing the response. The authority's suit is over a new law that sets a cap of 2 percent annually on the amount sewerage authorities can increase their bills to their member towns regardless of how much sewerage is collected. RVSA's reply due by Friday, January 25.

An additional vote will be needed by commissioners to approve the 2019 budget due to some changes. Final

approval is expected at next month's meeting. The budget revenue is roughly \$27.2 million, with appropriations of \$27.5 million and capital appropriations of \$1.65 million, RVSA officials said.

Hearings with Rahway and Clark regarding sewerage flow rights exceedances that had been scheduled for January 10 were adjourned until Thursday, March 21. Clark had sent a letter taking issue with both flow measurements and exceedances. A response is being constructed by Dennis Estis, RVSA's outside counsel; Jim Meehan, executive director, and John Buonocore, RVSA's in-house engineer. An issue also exists with Springfield related to proper operation of meters measuring sewerage flow.

Thursday's meeting began with a presentation, in closed session, from Girish Mehta of Prestige Environmental related to Quala. The meeting minutes indicated the closed session would be related to attorney/client

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BouLOVEard...Love is in the air at this house on Boulevard in Westfield.



CIRCLE OF UNITY...The First Congregational Church of Westfield played host to Westfield's 32nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Interfaith Commemoration Service on Monday. Music, prayers and speeches united the attendees in remembering Dr. King, who left the inspirational words, "I think I have discovered the highest good. It is love."

Cranford Superintendent Answers Questions About Reimagining Plans

By ROBYN ORR-GIOFFRE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Superintendent of Schools Scott Rubin, Ed.D., and the Cranford Board of Education (BOE) fielded questions, Tuesday night, at Livingston Avenue School, related to plans for installing full-day kindergarten in the Cranford district.

Several meetings have been held to address concerns over an original plan introduced to the district in October, referred to as "Reimagining" Cranford Schools by Mr. Rubin and the BOE.

On December 17, nine other options that would make full-day kindergarten possible in the district were presented to the public, based on a study conducted by Ross Haber and Associates.

Former Interim Superintendent of Schools in Cranford, Marilyn Birnbaum, Ed.D., spoke at the meeting in regards to the strengths and weaknesses of the district, and although she made clear she was not speaking "to advocate for any plan," she found Cranford to be "a district of schools" instead of "a school district," due to the current configuration of the schools.

Ms. Birnbaum suggested a comprehensive middle school would be beneficial in many ways and much would be gained by many of the things offered through the various plans.

She further commented that Cranford had parental support, a "Mayberry" type of environment and great leadership, and suggested that making some of the changes offered in the various plans would turn a "B" district into an "A."

Gina DiFabio, a full-day kindergarten teacher at Walnut Avenue School, also spoke at the meeting about "the gift of time" she has with her full-day kindergarten students

and made evident many of the teachers support any plan that would allow all kindergarteners to enjoy the same benefits.

Resident William Lapenta spoke to the board specifically about the Reimagining plan in regards to proposed construction of 905 apartments at 750 Walnut Avenue and questioned if the board would push back the plans if plans for building were approved.

Mr. Rubin commented that the board would consider "what is going on around us," and reaffirmed the idea that the report by Ross Haber and Associates did not factor in changes building at 750 Walnut Avenue would bring about.

"If there is a decision on Walnut," it may change which plan residents and parents feel is best for the district, Mr. Lapenta told the board.

Resident Eric Rubinson expressed concern over legislation being passed that would mandate full-day kindergarten if the current referendum, which would allow for full-day kindergarten in the district, does not pass, leaving the district in a type of limbo.

Mr. Rubin assured Mr. Rubinson that, while he was concerned about the legislation, he wanted full-day

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Freeholders to Vote on Summer Concerts Contracts

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY — The Union County Freeholder Board is expected to approve management and production contracts tonight for its Summer Arts Festival and Rhythm and Blues By The Brook concerts, as well as other entertainment events.

UltraArtists of Morristown is set to receive a \$29,400 contract for parks and recreation special events. This Is It! Productions of Hoboken is set to again receive contracts for the management and production of the Summer Arts Festival in July and August, in the amount of \$78,000, and for the Rhythm and Blues concert to be held Saturday, June 1, at Cedar Brook Park in Plainfield, in the amount of \$134,100.

At Thursday's agenda-setting meeting, Ron Zuber, parks and recreation director, said last year the county had the Summer Arts Festival and special events covered under one contract and that this year the combined costs of both contracts is going up \$9,000. He said last year's This Is It! contract was \$63,000 for the Summer Arts Festival, while the special events portion was \$33,000.

In addition, an agreement is to be entered into once again with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO) for \$35,000 to perform a concert on Friday, June 21, at Echo Lake Park in Mountainside/Westfield. The contract is the same amount as last year. Freeholder Angel Estrada asked if the county has looked for a donor to offset the cost of the NJSO concert.

"We've worked with New Jersey Symphony the last couple of years in trying to raise dollars for this," Mr. Zuber said, noting the concert has been paid for out of an existing trust fund the past three years, including 2019.

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CHILDREN WIN AT ANNUAL MLK SERVICE...Contest winners of poetry, essay and artwork were announced at Monday's 32nd Annual Westfield Commemorative Service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. First-, second- and third-place winners of the contest were recognized by Margaret Dolan, superintendent of the Westfield School District. The children were congratulated and are pictured with Superintendent Dolan and Warren Ward, exalted ruler of Centennial Lodge No. 400, and Lisa Middleton, daughter of the ruler from Centennial Temple No. 246.

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Congratulations to the Top Producers for the Month of December!

Sharon Steele
Overall Production
908.518.5287

Sharon Steele
Sales Associate
908.518.5287

Cathy Splinter
Listing Associate
908.233.5508

Deborah Citarella Team
Top Team
908.233.6607

Westfield West

600 North Avenue West
Westfield, NJ 07090
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