

By Sal Caruana, Westfield Town Councilman
Back to Future: Walking to School

Evidence is emerging that America is in the midst of a childhood obesity epidemic and a nutritional health crisis that poses major long-term health risks to our kids. Experts believe that in addition to the increased consumption of "junk food" — sugar, snacks, processed food — kids today are also getting far less exercise and less sleep than 20 years ago and overweight children are at an increased risk of developing high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease as adults.

The Internet age is also contributing to childhood sedentary behavior, as socialization has moved from open spaces to My Space.

The truth is that everyday choices have long-term impacts on our children. The healthy diets, exercise and active lifestyles that most adults pursue for their own wellbeing are just as important for their children's today.

As chairman of the Westfield Town Council's Public Safety, Parking and Transportation Committee, I would like to discuss an important everyday choice you and your children can make that will have multiple health, personal and community benefits: walking to school.

Recent studies have shown the children who walk to school enjoy higher levels of health, independence, fitness and activity. Walking to school also promotes safer and closer communities, a healthier environment, less traffic and congestion and, under adult supervision, opportunities for children to learn and interact with street crossing in a safe and active way.

On May 4, BRAKES will be sponsoring another "Walk To School Day" and also encouraging all parents and children to use it as an opportunity to form "walking-pools" for the remaining seven weeks of the school year (more information will be distributed in Westfield schools during the month of April).

Walking pools supervised by adults eliminate the biggest parental fear responsible for the decline of walking: concerns for the safety and personal vulnerability of our children. With your help, we can give the sidewalks back to our kids, along with the socialization and health benefits that come from parents and children walking to school.

Please join BRAKES, our PTO's and the Westfield Town Council in supporting this very important initiative.

By WF-BOE Candidate Anne Riegel

Demonstrate Commitment to Education

Since I joined the board of education in Westfield six years ago, I've learned so much about what it takes to achieve a high quality public school system. The community has great expectations for our schools, and I share this goal for excellence. I'm now finishing two years as board president after two years as vice president.

Like so many other families, we moved to Westfield because we valued the character of the town and the excellent school system. I first got involved in Westfield's schools back in 1994, when my daughter's kindergarten class had 25 students, and projections showed increasing enrollments and classroom shortages.

Later, I served on the 1998 Citizens Advisory Committee, which recommended the additions to Franklin and McKinley Schools. I also became Jefferson School's PTO co-president. As a board member, I've chaired the Finance and Long Range Planning Committees, and I'm currently on the Curriculum Committee and our new Community Outreach Committee.

There are a number of goals that I am proud to have helped develop since I've been on the board, such as: Maintaining a strong curriculum that's delivered consistently across the district; establishing differentiated instruction as the objective

for teaching in Westfield; completing the high school addition and all the new athletic facilities at Kehler; developing the program budget format, to help make the budget more easily understandable; using district technology more effectively for instruction and communication, including the new district website; and improving relations with the town council.

Looking forward, we still face many challenges. We need to address funding and budget issues, deal with rising enrollments, solve imbalances among schools, and provide the curriculum and professional development so our teachers can educate our children most effectively. Focusing on good communication with parents and the community will continue to be a priority.

If I'm reelected, I'll work hard to accomplish these goals and help our district move forward to remain an outstanding school district. My experience on the board, my financial and analytical abilities as well as my perspectives as a parent of 11th and eighth grade daughters will continue to help me add value as a board member.

I feel very lucky to live in a community that values its schools and its children so highly. I hope the community demonstrates its commitment to education by voting for the school budget on Tuesday.

By Jane Clancy WFOE Candidate

Time as Educator an Advantage

While serving as a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee, I learned a great deal about the challenges facing the current enrollment issues in our elementary and middle schools. However, our recommendations are to be made for the September 2007 enrollment issues, not this year's enrollment issues.

Our meetings began on January 5 and were due to end on February 9. As of April 5, we were onto our last meeting to discuss our final report. Obviously there is still a great deal more to discuss, but the bottom line is it would have been a disservice to the committee and to the community to report solutions that have not yet been finalized.

I have taken my role on this committee very seriously, being responsible to look beyond a quick fix or to leave decisions for a future committee to decide upon. I can tell you that I personally feel that we are unable to continually move children at the elementary school level because we are literally out of room. I also feel that we absolutely can create stronger programs for children at the middle school level to better prepare them for the rigorous road ahead in high school.

My priorities are to use my experience as a parent and an educator to provide our children with a rewarding, enriching and highly qualified program. If elected to the Westfield Board of Education, I would approach all challenges with the same integrity, open mind and strong commitment to our entire community as I have while serving on the Citizens Advisory Committee.

I thank you all for taking the time to read the articles from the candidates and for taking an interest in learning about this year's budget. I think the board and the administration have been fiscally responsible in creating this year's budget. We have learned how critically dependent our children's education is on our votes and how many vital programs would be affected if there were more cuts in programming.

There are always more ways to look at

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Letters to the Editor
Math Questions; On Deaf Ears?

I write to voice my concerns with the current situation with our Westfield math curriculum and its math department, particularly at the intermediate level.

We are on the verge of losing another valuable math teacher at Edison. Various community members, parents, students and coaches have expressed their support of this faculty member at the previous two board of education meetings. Despite the consistent expression of support, it has fallen on deaf ears from the principal at Edison, the BOE and from our superintendent of schools.

Let's Do Just That, Vote 'Yes' for School Budget

As our town faces the school election on April 18, I thought I'd take a moment to reflect on the property tax issue that many voters contemplate in the voting booth. The school budget question is the only time that a voter has the direct right to say yes or no to government spending.

Not one citizen is allowed an up or down vote on the federal, state, county or town budgets, but in New Jersey, we vote on our school budgets. Some states directly fund their schools and some states do so through county government, but either way, those states do not allow a voter the right to approve the budget.

With about 567 municipalities and over 450 school districts, New Jerseyans love 'home rule.' While headlines cry out for school funding reform, it continues the same. Residents seem to want their school spending dictated within the borders of their towns.

And so, let's do just that. Personally, I say "Yes" to this school budget. I have attended or watched every single board meeting at which the budget was discussed. I have watched the board consider programs, discuss costs and grapple with the tax burden that might be generated. I have come to understand what "unfunded mandates" and "mandatory obligations" are from the state, none of which will go away if the budget is defeated. I have seen the board dismiss projects and programs due to the cost not because they weren't needed. And most of all, I have seen the budget line by line and learned how the administration works daily to save money on energy costs, health insurance costs and services.

This school election couldn't be placed on a worse date than the day after Federal taxes are due; it's a day of unbelievable tension for many including my household. But I will vote yes because Westfield School taxes are just that — my money spent on Westfield kids, not some highway I'll never drive on or a foreign country I've never heard of — this is for our town. Positive school budget results keep home prices up, something every homeowner desires.

I urge every voter in Westfield to vote "Yes" because our kids are worth it and our town is too.

Merry Wisler
Westfield

day Math" in preparing our children with basic mathematical fundamentals and the resulting problem solving skills.

Faculty members who have followed the guidelines of teaching the "New Math," but may have questioned it, seem to have been punished for being malcontent while their overall objective is to "reach and teach" our children. Why else would there be such a high turnover in the intermediate math department? — Averaging one per year for the past five years.

Change is necessary when needed, but constant change is not, and is a waste of our tax dollars. Perhaps one should question the effectiveness of the head of the math department who should be reviewed and held accountable for the constant turnover in this department.

I suggest that the BOE needs to be responsive to the community and provide answers to the legitimate concerns that have been proposed at recent meetings. It is time for the BOE to understand that its constituents, "voters," and concerned parents have expressed their support for its faculty and are dissatisfied with the lack of general response to our questions and concerns. We are entitled to answers.

Fred DeFazio
Westfield

Vote 'Yes' for School Budget on April 18

During the past four months, I have watched as the Westfield Board of Education members have worked countless hours to deliver an acceptable budget that will maintain the quality of our education, but not drive a significant tax increase for its citizens.

They, along with Dr. Foley, have held numerous meetings to listen to community concerns and have made extra effort to have their discussions and decision making process open to the public through televised board meetings, budget presentations at all nine schools, posting information on their website and by providing televised candidates night and budget presentations on Blue Devils TV36.

We as a community should be grateful that these capable and committed people have been willing to step up to the plate and volunteer so much of their time for the benefit of our children. Their goal of producing an acceptable budget that has been thoroughly communicated to the community has been achieved.

Now it is our turn to do something for the children of Westfield. Remember to go out and vote 'yes' for the school budget on April 18, in order to continue the quality education we all strive to maintain for our children.

Cindy Gallagher
Westfield

By WF-BOE Candidate Beth Cassie
Important Qualities in BOE Member

On April 18, the town of Westfield will be voting on the school budget and three members of the school board. As a candidate for the board of education (BOE) and a current member of the board, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to vote. I would also like to take this opportunity to identify what I see as important qualities for a BOE member.

A BOE member must be someone who is accessible to the community, who listens to all of our constituencies and who is able to bring that information back to the board table in a constructive manner. I have worked hard to do this.

A BOE member must be a critical thinker, problem solver and facilitator. My background as a Harvard Business School trained management consultant makes me uniquely qualified as a board member. I am adept at analyzing and synthesizing conflicting data and points of view, challenging assumptions, persuading others and making hard decisions with uncertain information. I am energized by the complex nature of the challenges our district faces.

A board member must be able to understand the complexities of a \$75 million operating budget, which employs over 700 faculty and staff. Westfield delivers an educationally rich and successful program. Outstanding achievement is demonstrated in our students' academic and non-academic accomplishments. I believe we need to spend money to ensure future success, but we need to remain fiscally responsible to the entire community while investing in the future. Solving our overcrowding at the elementary and middle school levels, in a financially prudent manner, is an example of what I would like to see accomplished in the next three years. Being a steward for such a large and complex budget is serious business and I take my responsibilities as a board

member very seriously. A board member must have a strong working knowledge of this district to address the changes that are coming. In the next few months, there will be a new principal at the high school; the Citizens Advisory Committee will issue its recommendations about how to address enrollment growth at both the elementary and middle school levels and there will be public discussion about the possible sale of board properties. It is very important to have experienced board members involved in such critical decisions.

Over the past four years on the board I've worked with smart, dedicated people and have learned a tremendous amount about how a school district functions. In short, I am doing work that I truly value on behalf of students, parents and taxpayers. I ask for your support of the school budget on April 18 and also for me as a candidate.

Mountainside Rec. Dept. Updates Website

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Mountainside Recreation Department website has been newly updated. It can be accessed at www.mountainside-nj.com/recreation.htm. The website contains program details and registration information, as well as photographs, contact information, a calendar of events and links to useful recreation websites including that of the Mountainside Community Pool.

Planned features include downloadable registration forms and recreation news. Residents of Mountainside and surrounding communities are encouraged to bookmark the website, and use it to gain information and communicate with the recreation department. Contact the Mountainside Recreation Department at (908) 232-0015 for more information.

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