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Paul Peyton
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR
Suzette F. Stalker
COMMUNITY
Michael Pollack
EDUCATION & ARTS
Victoria McCabe
JOURNALIST

Horace R. Corbin
PUBLISHER
David B. Corbin
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS
Karen M. Hinds
OFFICE MANAGER

Fred K. Lecomte
MARKETING DIRECTOR
Michael L. Bartiromo
MARKETING PRODUCTION
Robert P. Connelly
OPERATIONS & LEGALS
Ben Corbin
SERVICES

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It's April Fools Day Saturday And the Joke's on the Taxpayers

"The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year." — Mark Twain.

The April Fool's Day tradition is thought to have started in France around 1582. Prior to that, the New Year was celebrated for eight days, beginning on March 25 and ending on April 1. The calendar was changed then by Charles IX. The Gregorian calendar was introduced and New Year's Day was moved to January 1. However, news back then traveled by foot and many did not learn of the calendar change for several years. Others refused to accept the new calendar and continued to celebrate the New Year on April 1.

The populace labeled these people as "fools" and subjected them to ridicule. They were made the butt of practical jokes.

This tradition of pranks on the first day of April spread to England and Scotland in the 18th century and was then introduced to the American colonies.

For the most part, April Fool's Day is supposed to be a funfest where some carry out their brand of humor at the expense of others.

Pranks on April Fool's Day range from simply saying, "Your shoe's untied!" or perhaps setting a roommate's alarm clock back an hour. Whatever the gag, the trickster ends it by yelling to his victim, "April Fool!"

It's April Fool's Day Saturday. Is that why nearly everyone's talking and writing about budgets and taxes? We think not.

It's because the government spending, borrowing and tax issues can no longer be ignored. We think it's bizarre; our leaders have spun, exploited, abused, plundered and pandered — and then to satisfy their addiction and enhance their grip on power, they reach deeper and

deeper into the taxpayers' pockets of today. Together with this, they massively borrow, which saddles those of the future with huge debt.

In the spirit of April Fool's Day, last week State Sen. Ray Lesniak of Union proposed selling the New Jersey Turnpike to help pay off our debt. He proposed Senate Bill by Sen. Lesniak on March 24: "S-1777 Permits New Jersey Turnpike Authority to sell or lease a non-controlling interest to private parties and directs that proceeds from this transaction be used to finance outstanding State pension obligations."

Perhaps Sen. Lesniak is serious, but it seems this did not amuse even Governor Jon Corzine.

Being a little early for April Fool's Day, in early March, Senator and Newark Mayor Sharpe James passed a bill in the Newark City Council to transfer about \$80 million of taxpayer money to a trust account and named himself as director-for-life for the account to dole it out to support business projects as he sees fit.

This is striking, as state taxpayers give about \$700 million to Newark schools. We wonder where the money goes. Many don't see this as a prank though few lawmakers or those responsible for enforcement dare even speak of the matter in public. Monday, Sharpe James fooled everyone again by withdrawing from the race for re-election as mayor, stating that he no longer believes in holding dual offices; hmmm...

April Fool's Day is supposed to be a fun little holiday — one where everyone must remain forever vigilant, for anyone may be the next fool.

Are we today's fools? Why are we the brunt of these jokes? Is it our fault by not remaining forever vigilant — because we elect them, let them get away with it, prefer delusion, exercise too little responsibility on our own and want more than we can afford?

Letters to the Editor

Fair Contract Needed for Teachers; Students, Parents and Taxpayers Also

Editor's Note: This letter was sent to Mr. Fazzino and copied to *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

Thank you for taking the time to write to the Board of Education (Scotch Plains-Fanwood) with your concern regarding the ongoing negotiations with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association. Your e-mail has been shared with the board members and placed on the agenda for our March meetings.

We agree with you that we have outstanding, dedicated teachers and that our schools have given an incredible boost to our property values. We also agree that to keep and attract the best teachers, we must have a fair contract. The Board of Education has always agreed on a contract that is in line with the rest of Union County and other districts of our stature, and we have never had difficulty in attracting or keeping quality staff. And we will do so this time. But we need to have a fair contract, not only for the teachers, but also for the students, parents and taxpayers.

I disagree with your description of our negotiations process as a "feud." We are not proposing to take anything away from the teachers. The board on behalf of the community is asking the teachers to work with us to solve the problem of spiraling health care costs. However, if we cannot meet this challenge together, taxes will continue to rise, driving residents out,

lowering property values, and increasing class sizes as we cut staff to find the funds to meet union demands. This scenario benefits no one.

You are right about the outstanding educational reputation of our community and the high quality of the school system. Not only are these a result of the fine teaching staff we have, but also of the efforts of the administration, principals and Board of Education. They also come from the support of the residents of Scotch Plains and Fanwood who financially support over 90 percent of the budget through their taxes. State and Federal funding cover less than 8 percent of our budget, and our two communities have little commercial or industrial taxables to help lower the property tax burden. The community supports the schools, but we want a fair contract, too.

We are glad you have chosen our community and are sure your son will have the same fine education his mother and her siblings received. Scotch Plains and Fanwood are wonderful places in which to raise children. All of the board members either have children in the local schools now or have seen their children graduate from this district and go on to achieve success. We are dedicated to maintaining the quality of the school district.

Linda Nelson, President
SP-F Board of Education

Day of Reckoning On State Budget Is Here; Local Officials Must Now Act

The day of reckoning for the New Jersey State budget has arrived. Whether you are a Republican or Democrat, politics must be set aside so that the large debt and problems we face can effectively be dealt with at this critical time. The governor has stated that he will not be able to assist our communities with additional rebate property taxes, which he promised while campaigning.

Therefore, our community, Scotch Plains, must work towards the goal of reducing our school budget by the board

of education, as all corporations would do in difficult times. Similar reductions, but of a much smaller scale, will have to be made by our municipal government and hopefully, but unfortunately, not to be expected, by our county officials.

We, the people and residents who pay all the costs, must now demand strong action by all of our officials because we no longer have the luxury of over-spending.

Alice and Marvin Agran
Scotch Plains

Maestro Silipigni Was Internationally Acclaimed; Remembered in Westfield

I was sorry to learn of the death of Maestro Alfredo Silipigni. As reported in *The Star Ledger*, "The New Jersey State Opera, which Silipigni guided from an amateur group to a professional company with international standards, was his first love." That "amateur group" actually was the Opera Company of Westfield, which I incorporated while I was practicing law in Westfield around 1965.

When I was, many years later, a member of the chorus in the New Jersey State Opera production of *Tosca* at the NJPAC, which by now had professional singers in the key roles, I reminded the maestro of the early Westfield company. He remembered it well. I calculate he was about 30 at the time he was in Westfield.

There were a number of driving forces and people behind creating this Westfield Opera, but few of them are still here. Singer Sally Schmallenberger, the wife

of the realtor Elmer Schmallenberger, was the one who recruited me for the legal work, and to work on the first production, *Fleidermaus* by Strauss, on the stage of Roosevelt. Others involved were the late Bud Mayo, a singer in the chorus, and his wife Dot, who did much of the costume work, who is in North Carolina.

Another former Westfield singer, Barbara Sheridan, is now in Maryland. There were at least two other productions, *La Boheme* and *Traviata*. Perhaps *The Westfield Leader* can find them in their archives; they would have been in the 60s.

I was not involved in either of those productions. After that the company reorganized and moved to Newark. I believe to the Mosque on Broad St. At one time, we went to see *Othello* with, I believe, Jerome Hinds in the lead.

Bud Boothe
Westfield

Everyone Has To Be Fluent In Numbers; Failure Is Not An Option

I applaud Deborah Madison for taking the time to learn a bit about mathematics instruction in the United States. As she points out, other countries have consistently outperformed the United States on math assessments for decades. And, unfortunately, too many of us seem to accept this.

It amazes me that it is still acceptable for adults in our society to admit that they cannot figure out a tip in their head. I don't think I have ever heard an educated adult admit that he can't read, but I do hear people freely announce that they "can't do math." As a country, we have to improve the way we teach mathematics.

Acknowledging this need for improvement, the Westfield schools researched, reviewed and piloted various math programs before introducing the Everyday Math program in 1999. As stated in the article, the Everyday Math program was developed after an extensive 10-year research project conducted by the University of Chicago. It is not a new, experimental program; it has been used by a small percentage of districts in the country for over 20 years.

Taking the figure of 2.8 million students cited in the article, approximately 8 percent of students in public and private schools in the United States are learning math from the Everyday Math program. Most of the schools that employ this program serve communities somewhat similar to Westfield, Scotch Plains and Mountainside. They are communities with parents who have attained a high level of education and who realize the importance of mathematics.

The Everyday Math program does encourage students to think about ways to solve problems. Does anyone remember providing the correct answer to a problem, but having it marked wrong because you did not use the formula in the book? One difference in Everyday Math is that, as long as you are able to explain your thinking, you may arrive at a correct answer in more than one way.

Westfield would not adopt a math program that did not teach basic math skills. Instruction in every academic discipline requires attention to skills, as well as knowledge and understanding. The Everyday Math program addresses each of these.

Some other math programs focus almost entirely on instruction in skills. This results in individuals who can complete work sheets or computer drills, but who may not be able to determine which mortgage is better or how to interpret statistics cited in the media.

Students who are instructed in Everyday Math do not complete their daily work with a calculator at their side. In fact, students actually learn when it is appropriate to use calculators and when it is not efficient to do so. When the objective of a lesson is to learn basic calculation, for example, the students would not be allowed to use a calculator.

As someone who enjoys working with numbers, I would like to take the opportu-

nity to discuss some of the figures used in the article. According to the New Jersey Department of Education, there were 1,268 public schools in New Jersey that administered the fourth grade assessment in 2005. The article stated that there were 649.

I am a bit perplexed by the statement, "Dozens of poorer school districts, such as Elizabeth, Bayonne and Camden out-rank these upscale, local school districts." It certainly is true that the gifted and talented school in Bayonne and the gifted and talented school in Elizabeth have 100 percent of their students passing the state math assessment in grade four. These schools do rank ahead of Westfield, Scotch Plains-Fanwood and Mountainside.

These students and their teachers and administrators should be very proud of that accomplishment. The two Camden schools that appear near the top of the state list are certainly remarkable. They are so remarkable that the Camden County Prosecutor's Office and the New Jersey Department of Education looked into the cause for their dramatic rise in scores in the past year.

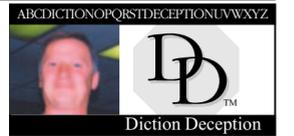
If these investigations find that these educators have found a miraculous strategy for the instruction of math, Westfield will be at the front of the line to learn from them.

As noted by the author of the article, "...Westfield, Scotch Plains-Fanwood and Mountainside schools consistently ranked among the top performing districts..." Yet, while the teachers, parents and administrators in Westfield are always striving to improve the learning provided to all students, I want to be clear that our schools are not going to reach 100 percent proficiency on every state-mandated test. Under current state and federal regulations, every single student who resides in Westfield and registers in a public school must take and pass this test.

But, the fact is that a student with significant cognitive disabilities will not be able to pass a test that is constructed to assess students who are working on their appropriate grade level. A student who has been learning English as a second language for two years is not likely to have the command of the language necessary to solve multi-step word problems.

Again, I would like to thank Deborah Madison for bringing mathematics instruction to the forefront. The teachers and administrators in the public and private schools in Union County spend a great deal of time not only teaching mathematics to our students, but also thinking about how that instruction can be improved. One of our on-going tasks is to challenge those students who understand the importance of mathematics and inspire those students whose interests lie in other subject areas. Everyone is our society has to be fluent in the language of numbers. Failure is not an option.

Dr. Margaret Dolan, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent
Of Curriculum and Instruction
Westfield Public Schools



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. Sug — An unidentified parasite on trout
2. Chololith — A gallstone
3. Hulver — An evergreen shrub or tree
4. Preces — Short responsive prayers in church worship

SPHENISCAN

1. In law, a notary or scrivener
2. A worthless fellow; tramp
3. A steward
4. A penguin

BURINIST

1. A small metal counter used in some card games
2. A freed slave
3. An engraver
4. A spruce fellow; one who struts or swaggers

CHAMAL

1. The angora goat
2. A peculiar bronzelike luster in certain minerals, often iridescent
3. The fermented juice of pears
4. Grayish blue

SPHRAGISTICS

1. A well-executed plan or scheme
2. The science of engraved seals
3. Pertaining to slavery or bondage
4. Act of getting to the truth of any matter by strict inquiry

Letters to the Editor

More letters on pages 5, 17, 18, 20

Emperor's New Math Brings Situation View

I would like to commend you (*The Westfield Leader and The Times*) for last week's article "The Emperor's New Math," and for bringing this situation to the eyes of all of your readers.

Westfield's current math supervisor is the one that brought this program to our schools. Although she has heard from many Westfield parents and teachers that this program is not working, she is apparently not listening. It's also interesting, or should I say appalling, to see the number of math teacher turnovers in our intermediate schools under her reign.

Where could the problem lie? Maybe it's time for a new emperor.

Barbara Ferro
Westfield

Police Capt. Thanks Squad For EMS Care

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Westfield Rescue Squad who responded on Monday, January 9, following my involvement in a motor vehicle accident. I was en route to work on Mountain Avenue when another motorist struck me.

Immediately after the crash, I attempted to pick up my cell phone from the floor and noticed a sharp pain in my neck that necessitated my request for the rescue squad. Stephen Kowalski was immediately on the scene, as he happened to be across the street, while members Jean Gladis and John Dilorio responded with the ambulance. Their kindness and professionalism was second to none. Their knowledge and treatment was beyond comparison.

They were calm and explained everything they were going to do to ensure that I did not become concerned. I must tell you that I was embarrassed by the fact that they had to take me out on the backboard; however, having been on the outside looking in, I understood why. Fortunately, my inquiries were minor and I have fully recovered.

Over my 30 years on the Westfield Police Department, I have continually witnessed individuals given professional treatment by the rescue squad at times when they are most frightened and vulnerable. Some might say that the care I received might have been somewhat special because I am a police officer in Westfield, but my situation only personally confirmed what I have witnessed many times. The importance of the rescue squad's role in Westfield and the services they provide can never be overstated.

I offer my personal thanks and appreciation to the Westfield Rescue Squad for their outstanding service.

Captain Clifford Aucher
Westfield Police Department

Deficit, Tax Cuts Are Bad for Our Country

Mr. Attanasio and I could go back and forth for months, each citing numerous sources and statistics to prove the other wrong. The statistics that he cites may be true; I don't know, I haven't checked them yet. However, cutting taxes cannot be our only economic policy.

The Republican leadership talks about fiscal discipline, but given a chance to vote on re-instituting "pay go" budget rules (requiring that lost revenue from tax cuts be offset by reducing spending and vice-versa), they voted the proposal down. This is because they would like to be unfettered in their ability to cut taxes, regardless of the long term consequences of deficits and the national debt. The U.S. Treasury indicates that for every dollar we currently borrow, we end up paying \$5 in interest. Who's going to pay the interest Mr. Attanasio? Your children, my children and our children's children, that's who. The point I'm making is simple; deficit financed tax cuts are bad.

Chris Sdao
Westfield

Deadlines

- General News - Friday 4pm
- Weekend Sports - Monday 12pm
- Classifieds - Tuesday 12pm
- Ad Reservation - Friday 4pm
- www.goleader.com

Letters to the Editor

Westfield BOE Member Takes Issue With 'New Math' Column

Even before I was elected to the Westfield Board of Education, I was always interested in comparing our district with others and I've always enjoyed a debate over the use of statistics. Thus, I'd love to take issue with some of the items you raise in your March 23 article on Everyday Math headlined "The Emperor's New Math" (no headline spellchecker?).

First of all, the writer is perplexed as to why "dozens of poorer school districts" score higher than our local, upscale district. A quick use of Google returns the answer - individual schools, not entire districts, score higher. Two schools in mentioned districts house gifted and talented programs, and the scores for one of the others were 57 percent higher than the year before for the same group of students, prompting an investigation. Might some schools be spending a lot of time just teaching to the test? Interested readers may compare for themselves at www.nj.com/news/reportcard/ and examine the raw scores behind the rankings.

Another part of the article implies that attendance at after-school tutoring businesses might be attributable to the use of

Everyday Math in local districts. I think it is more likely that motivated local parents can pay for the service and that Westfield businesses tend to attract students from nearby schools. It would be more interesting if a lot of Westfield parents actually drove their kids to other towns for tutoring.

However, the writer (or perhaps editor) left off what could have been the most interesting part of the story. At the end, the article refers to several local districts that have dropped Everyday Math. I'd like to know which districts and if those students show improvement by some objective criteria. Concrete examples like that would have eliminated much of the speculation and statistical misrepresentation in the article.

Personally, I would like to see Westfield at the top of the charts in every test offered, but that is impossible in a district our size. But keep in mind, you can't judge schools based upon the numbers alone - I am proud of the mathematics curriculum that our district offers.

Gary McCready
Westfield Board of Education

Do It The Way I Learned Mathematics

Many thanks to Ms. Madison for her recent article on Everyday Math. My seventh grader was in one of the first classes to "test" the new math curriculum for Westfield.

The new math was introduced to Westfield families with frequent meetings and letters assuring us of its superiority in advancing learning. I was quite disconcerted to learn, however, on my child's enrollment in middle school that no officials were monitoring how these children actually fared in their skills when they left the everyday math learning in elementary school. Test scores certainly provide some indication of skills attained, but how did these children who were raised on the everyday math curriculum compare to their peers who did not?

Moreover, I was advised by some teachers that I should teach my child how to perform such skills as multiplication "the way I learned to do it" because that would be a more expeditious way for him to continue to advance his math skills in middle and high school.

Frances Ward
Westfield

