

# The Westfield Leader

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## The 'False-Foe Phenomenon' of Taxpayers Versus 'The Alliance'

One of the most powerful and energetic political alliances in our society is that of the local boards of education with the teachers unions and the PTOs. Mostly, the goals of 'The Alliance' are good - "At all cost, do what is necessary to enhance the education of our youth." Society depends on 'The Alliance' to champion this cause.

Unfortunately, the system pits 'The Alliance' against the taxpayers each year during voting for school budgets and bonds. Has this created a "false foe phenomenon?"

Who is the real foe? 'The Alliance' received a shock in December when the NJ State Assembly approved legislation to begin dissolving local BOEs and start forming countywide units instead. 'The Alliance' reacted with a fury and scared the h#!! out of the legislature. The state senate then narrowly defeated the measure, but the initiative is not dead.

Perhaps now, 'The Alliance' must realize that the foe is in Trenton and that which Trenton embodies - corruption, double dipping, pay-to-play, dual office

holding, malfeasance, no-bid contracts, ad nauseam.

'The Alliance' would have more to gain by joining the taxpayer in the fight against Trenton - in our view.

Imagine the impact if the PTOs in Newark had third-graders write letters, "Dear Senator Sharpe James, Why did you sell our land to your friends for a dollar a square foot?"

Or, if Edison Intermediate School children wrote letters, "Dear Senator Wayne Bryant, Why did you accept pay for no-show jobs when the money could have been used for school lunch in Camden?"

Or, if Roosevelt Intermediate School children wrote letters, "Dear Senate President Richard Codey, If you end corruption by others but exempt yourself and other legislators, will we still get a better library?"

So whether the school bond referendum passes or fails in Westfield this coming Tuesday, let's not forget where to put our energy in the future toward improving funding for education. Let's challenge the morass in Trenton and flush the 'false-foe phenomenon' of taxpayers versus 'The Alliance.'

More Letters  
Page 18

### Letters to the Editor

## School Bond is Best Way to Address Students' Needs And to Preserve the Westfield Education Value

For the past 12 months, the Westfield Board of Education has actively sought the opinions of hundreds of local residents about how to respond to current elementary school overcrowding and intermediate school enrollment imbalances. These conversations took place at meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment, school PTOs, and local civic groups, in pre-school auditoriums, local coffee shops and many private homes. The response to these discussions is the proposal in the Westfield school bond referendum.

There is no one perfect solution to the situation now facing the Westfield Public Schools; but we believe the compromise

proposal being offered provides the best opportunity to preserve what is most highly valued in a Westfield education.

We have been on the board of ed for a combined total of more than 13 years and have evaluated and constructively criticized proposed solutions to many quandaries faced by the district. The problems facing us today are complex, but after evaluating the alternatives, we believe that this bond is the most appropriate way to address our students' needs, respect overburdened taxpayers, preserve the distinction of a Westfield education, and sustain the demand for and value of Westfield home properties. The bond referendum offers a broad-based solution

with benefits for many but the overall is much more reasonable than many of the alternatives considered.

Many have asked us why we can't cover these costs in our regular operating budget. In prior years we were able to "save up" for major building renovations and maintenance costs, but recent NJ state legislation has imposed budget growth caps and prohibits us from holding more than a 2 percent reserve fund. As a result, we can no longer pay for major repairs or improvements in an operating budget or reserve budget funds for future use.

Each year's operating budget is highly scrutinized. The good news is that in state comparisons reviewing district total costs per pupil, recent Westfield school budgets have been notable for keeping spending below average. And, we have applied this same mindset of frugality in establishing the budget contained in the bond, which enables us to amortize these costs over 20 years.

Many have also asked why we haven't given them a choice of proposals. We are community officials elected to provide citizen governance for what our schools need and what our community wants, but we are also responsible for ensuring that Westfield taxpayers get the most for their tax dollars. Each part of the bond proposal contributes to the current needs of Westfield schools in a fiscally practical way.

Continuous improvement in our schools is a positive reflection on our community's strength and property values. Two of our children are no longer Westfield students, but they benefited from past bonds paid for by many of our friends and neighbors. In turn, we will pay for the opportunity of future generations of children to benefit from this bond. A thriving community must stand together to give continued financial support to its public schools. What do we stand to gain? What is the value of a Westfield education? What is the value of a thriving community where real estate remains in demand by young families seeking a Westfield education for their children?

I hope you will join us by voting yes for the school bond referendum on January 23. Polling hours are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Vote at your regular voting location.

Beth Cassie, member  
Westfield Board of Education

Anne Riegel, President  
Ginny Leiz, V.P., Finance Chair  
Westfield Board of Education

## Selling Elm Building Could Generate Funds for Lincoln, Roosevelt Projects

I am not sure if this \$10 million bond is "right for the children" of Westfield - having a centralized kindergarten and spending millions to make the Roosevelt cafeteria bigger. I don't know. What I do know is, as long as voting booths are in the schools, whatever the BOE wants, they are going to get.

I equate this to people who call themselves Republican or Democrat. They walk in the booth and vote party line. They don't care who the candidate is or what they have been indicted for - they vote the line. As long as these booths are in the schools, the soccer moms will vote whatever the BOE says, because they want whatever they can get for "their kids," even if there is no bang for the taxpayers buck.

Move the voting booths (especially one of these non-political election voting years) out of the schools and into the "Y," VFW Post, the municipal building or even the Trolley. Then, the town will

have a better chance of controlling the BOE.

I thought that selling the Elm Street building was part of the original equation. The Lincoln School could be sold to McMansion builders also. Take the proceeds of both sales, let's say \$10 million, and use some of it to improve the library at Roosevelt Intermediate School as well as other critical needs. I don't think spending money for a bigger lunch room is the best use of funds.

The several million remaining could be put in an interest bearing account, or used to pay off some of the existing debt to reduce payments. The BOE could rent office space that could be paid for with the interest.

In short, rather than borrowing more money and paying more interest, rearrange under-used assets and better apply the money to the important needs.

John Mancini  
Westfield

## Vote 'Yes' this Tuesday in the Westfield School Bond Referendum

I am the parent of a 3-year-old pre-school student and a 5-year-old kindergarten, and I am volunteering my time on the (Westfield's) Citizens for Education Committee. The committee's goal is to educate Westfield residents on the upcoming Tuesday, January 23 school bond referendum. The goals of the bond are to create space in our over-crowded elementary schools, especially grades 3-5 and to create a safe environment at the Roosevelt Middle School.

In order to create space in the elementary schools, a centralized early learning education center, including kindergarten would be developed. This would free up space in all elementary schools, keeping class size at 18 to 25 and provide the very important opportunity for an art and/or music room in all elementary schools. The key benefits for the early childhood learning center are numerous, including a strengthened program with targeted expertise for the pre-school handicapped and kindergarten aged children. It is important to note that the early childhood learning center provides the opportunity for bringing out of district placements back to Westfield resulting in cost savings.

I toured the Roosevelt Middle School and was horrified. In addition to unsafe and deteriorated stairwells and dimly lit hallways, I was distressed to learn that many of our town's children eat lunch in less than 20 minutes (10 minutes to be exact). The cafeteria is too small to ac-

commodate a full grade in a period therefore necessitating the need for a split period lunch. Did you know the size of the library is below state standards? This limits the types of resources available to our children. Last, but not least, because the breezeway is not enclosed and the school doors need to be locked, foot traffic resulting from diverting children to use the upper "enclosed bridge" is a nightmare. Enclosing the breezeway allows for less congested hallways and therefore a safer environment.

I have decided to work on helping to promote this bond because if it is defeated, I believe our children will suffer as overcrowded classrooms will adversely impact the quality of their education. If this bond does not pass, class sizes will be increased, art/music on a cart will continue and the music and art rooms at Franklin School will be jeopardized, more redistricting will occur, Roosevelt students will be educated in a sub-optimal environment with 10 minutes to eat lunch and the bottom line is, Westfield's school system will begin to deteriorate. I want more for my children and their future and hope you feel the same.

Support our town, our schools and our future by voting 'Yes' on January 23 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at your usual polling area.

Gina Totino  
Westfield

## 'No' to Bond Vote Is the Only One That Makes Sense for Westfield

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) vote to spend several million dollars on the administration building at 302 Elm Street - at a time when Westfield's students were going to school in trailers and the nine school buildings were shabby and in disrepair.

Despite protests and opposition, the BOE has done just that. Reasoned and researched proposals for the sale of 302 Elm Street have been ignored. The minority board members who have had the intelligence and courage to see the wisdom of converting the building to an asset deserve our respect and gratitude.

Why does the Board of Education refuse to use this financial resource? Board offices do not need to be moved to Lincoln School, although it was a logical step at the time. There are other choices.

How can Westfield continue to ignore this financial asset and revenue stream? Why are the taxpayers being asked to continue to compensate for this unnecessary deficit? How can we have confidence in the financial decisions of the Board of Education when we go to the polls January 23? A "No" vote is the only one that makes sense.

Joanne Hone  
Westfield

## Centralized Kindergarten Would Be Something Parents Could Count On

As the mother of two young children, one not yet in the Westfield public school system, I felt I should write to clarify a point that I have not seen addressed in coverage of enrollment issues and in other letters to the editor regarding the upcoming school bond vote on January 23.

The creation of an early childhood learning center at Lincoln School is desirable for many reasons, most of which have been covered already. One other benefit of an early childhood learning center is that parents would know in advance where their kindergartners would attend school in the fall. As parents, it is our responsibility to manage our children's expectations and prepare them for what they will face when they leave our homes.

We have already experienced that neighborhood schools are a goal, not a guarantee. When schools need room, it is easier to move kindergartners than any other grade in an elementary school. Wilson School, where my older son is a second-grader, faced this situation for the 2006-2007 school year. About 20 students whose neighborhood school is Wilson currently attend kindergarten at Franklin School, which had enough space to accommodate them this year. This is a situation that has been faced at Jefferson and Washington Schools in recent years. That it happens one year and not others shows how difficult it can be to predict where there will be an enrollment bubble in a given year. An enrollment surge of five to 10 new students would be much

more easily accommodated at a centralized kindergarten with approximately 18 sections. That many additional kindergarten children at one elementary school with only one or two sections could cause the class sizes to grow too large and force some children to attend someone else's neighborhood school for a year.

It would be less disruptive if all affected families could know this situation was coming in time to consider other options, but a school may not know it has more kindergartners than it can accommodate until after private school deadlines have passed. And many families cannot or would not consider private kindergarten, and they shouldn't have to, when a perfectly good public school is available.

What we can know, if the bond passes, is that kindergartners would go to Lincoln School. Parents could prepare their preschoolers (and their older siblings) for this fact. Staggered start times would mean that they might be able to walk to school with older siblings and get on a bus there, walk to schools with older siblings and then walk to their own school, or be driven to Lincoln. Is it less convenient than kindergarten in your neighborhood school? Yes, but it's something you can count on and something you can prepare your children for, and that is something we can all vote for.

Amy Root  
Westfield

## How Does Westfield School Bond Referendum Benefit me?

We frequently get asked this question and here is my answer:

The bond benefits every person, young and old who resides in Westfield. Our town prides itself on an excellent educational system. It is one of the main selling points for potential buyers; it's why most of us move to Westfield and why many people move back to raise their families.

In order to maintain our signature in excellence, we must continually meet higher standards in our curriculum, replace outdated technology and upgrade our facilities. Like us, many towns are finding themselves in similar situations of increased enrollment while still trying to maintain smaller class sizes, increasing numbers of Special Ed students, the desire to move them 'indirectly,' the loss of music and art rooms and inevitably the aging of facilities. But Westfield has an opportunity to address these issues at a very reasonable cost. We, unlike other communities, have a building, which we can renovate and create a state of the art early childhood learning center, a step many communities are taking.

We can also answer the call of the Citizen's Advisory Committee to make long overdue renovation to Roosevelt's

aging facility, its cafeteria and at the same time extend that addition to add much needed additional instructional space in the library. We can address security issues by enclosing an open breezeway.

Many communities are seeking bonds much larger than ours. We truly have put together a plan that meets the needs of our children and is respectful of the taxpayer. So while you may not have a child that may actually use the building that is being renovated, you certainly will reap the benefits in the long run when people are looking to settle into our community, not just because it is a great town to live but especially because it is a great town to raise our children.

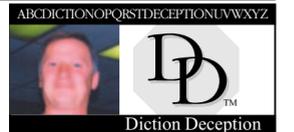
Jane Clancy, member  
Westfield Board of Ed.  
And Pre-school teacher

### Creative Writing Contest

See the Bernard Heeny Creative Writing Contest details at:  
www.goleader.com/tiw/contest

### Intern Program Note

See the Leader/Times summer internship program details at:  
www.goleader.com/internship



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. Scheelite - Calcium tungstate  
2. Iniquation - The act of defiling; corruption  
3. Yauld - Active, vigorous  
4. Tovarisch - Comrade in the Soviet Union

### ANATINE

- In zoology, having no joints
- A pineapple
- Soda; native sodium carbonate
- Resembling a duck

### CRISPIN

- A shoemaker
- A family of wading birds related to the plovers
- A Brazilian parakeet
- A small brook

### QUERL

- To please
- To drop food from the mouth when partly masticated
- To coil or wind round
- To quiver or to shake

### TRAU LISM

- Roving idly; going astray
- Passing on unfavorable genetic traits
- Responding slowly to an external stimulus
- A stammering

## More Letters on Page 18

## Theft Against One Is Theft Against Us All

Allow me to add my voice to that of my colleague Father Harms in expressing great dismay over the theft of religious statuary from local Catholic institutions. This is not a Catholic issue, any more than the appearance of a swastika in the high school is a Jewish issue.

We are members of one community, and an act of theft or vandalism against one house of worship is against us all. I join with Father Harms, Father Masiello, and all my brothers and sisters in faith in hoping that the missing items will be restored.

Rabbi Douglas Sagal  
Temple Emanu-El  
Westfield

## The School Bond is not Just for Kindergarten

On January 23, the residents of Westfield have an opportunity vote on a school bond referendum, which will strengthen our schools and maintain the standard of excellence we demand. I am working as a volunteer on a committee, Citizens for Education, to promote the school bond referendum.

During the last several weeks, I have gained an appreciation for what the bond referendum means to education in our town, and I have read and heard an awful lot of misinformation. I am writing this letter to share some important information - the facts - and let you know why I think the bond is important.

Most importantly, the construction at Lincoln School to establish an early childhood learning center is not just a kindergarten issue. One significant benefit of the proposal is that it will enable us to maintain the smaller class sizes that benefit all Westfield elementary students by effectively adding one or two classrooms in each of the elementary schools. Without the bond, there is a very real possibility that we will need to increase class sizes beyond district policy. This is especially true for grades 3 to 5.

The proposed renovations at Roosevelt are necessary. They are not a band-aid to address middle school enrollment issues. The renovations address very fundamental safety and education issues. In these times, we must enclose the breezeway and we cannot leave the doors to our middle schools open. Roosevelt needs a bigger cafeteria - 20 minutes for lunch simply is not enough time to eat, much less socialize.

The proposal is necessary to maintain the value of a Westfield education. Whether or not you have kids in school, most residents realize that the Westfield School system enhances our property values and is a source of pride. The construction directly impacts some of the fundamentals of our school system: class size, safety and the arts.

Currently, Lincoln School is leased to the Union County Education Services Commission - under circumstances that are of great concern to the surrounding neighborhood and the Board of Education. By voting in favor of the bond and renovating Lincoln School to be used as an early childhood learning center, we recapture a school for use by Westfield students. This is especially important with the recent movement in Trenton to regionalize school districts on a county-wide basis.

The alternatives are unacceptable. If the bond does not pass, our schools will suffer with larger class sizes and art and music on the cart; the Roosevelt situation will continue to deteriorate and the future of the Lincoln School will only fester. Doing nothing is not an option.

In talking to friends and neighbors, I sense that many people see the bond as just another tax increase. Certainly, construction has a cost (approximately \$80 per year for the average family). However, it is helpful to recognize the benefit we realize on this investment. In the near future, we will be able to take advantage of the additional space made available at all elementary schools as a result of relocating the kindergartners to Lincoln School. In the long run, we all benefit from investing in our real estate and making capital improvements to our schools.

When all things are considered, I hope you will vote "Yes" for the school bond on January 23. The bond represents an opportunity to make an investment in our town, our schools and our future.

Kathleen Caminiti, Westfield  
Member of Citizens for Education

