

Committee Name:
Senate Committee – Education
(SC–Ed)

Appointments

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Clearinghouse Rules

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Committee Hearings

99hr_SC–Ed_CH_pt00

Committee Reports

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Executive Sessions

99hr_SC–Ed_ES_pt00

Hearing Records

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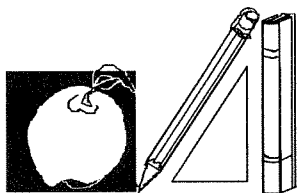
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Record of Committee Proceedings

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Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

Whitefish Bay, WI

February, 1999

Volume 5, Number 3

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In case you haven't noticed, the principle of local control of our public schools is under siege. True, I'm not aware of a broad-based movement that openly espouses wresting control from the local level. Indeed, elected officials often express allegiance to the notion of empowering parents and others locally. Unfortunately, however, actions and policies being formulated in Madison are having the opposite effect.

There has already been a great deal said in our newsletters and in the local media about state-mandated academic standards and assessments and about the new state law barring so-called "social promotions." But, there has been somewhat less attention devoted to the state-mandated high school graduation test that is to first be given in the school year 2002-2003.

Local control advocates have derived some solace in knowing that this test is still a few years away from being implemented (the current eighth grade class will be the first group to be tested) and, more importantly, in knowing that the law allows parents the right have their children opt out of taking the test. Some powerful forces, however, have taken dead aim at the parent option provision.

Both Governor Thompson and certain high ranking officials in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction are now on record as wanting to repeal that provision. In my mind, this threatens local control at its most fundamental level, by trying to take away from parents their right to choose. As described in an accompanying article beginning on page 3 by Connie Gavin and Meredith Scrivner, there is a host of legitimate reasons why parents generally might wish to exercise the option. Moreover, in Whitefish Bay, the parent option is an especially important one to preserve, because our school district has purposefully developed its own curriculum standards (consistent with the terms of the state standards law) and such standards probably will not track the content of the graduation test, thereby raising questions about how well our children would do on the test and the consequences that would follow.

Let me be clear on one thing. Our objection to eliminating the parent option is not based on any

Making Sense of Homework

A forum for parents and educators
to learn more about and discuss
homework issues

Tuesday, March 16, 1999
Whitefish Bay Middle School Center Gym
7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

The forum will include panelists from a variety of backgrounds:

- a representative of the Whitefish Bay School District, to discuss the District's homework policy;
- a member of the Education Department at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, to discuss current research on homework - its basis and its effectiveness; and
- a child psychologist, to discuss developmental and psychological aspects of homework.

After the panelists' presentations, parents, school administrators and teachers will be invited to participate in roundtable discussions grouped by school level.

Forum Open to the Community
Bring a Friend

Inside this Issue:

- Parent Options for Graduation Test Threatened
- Parent Teacher Councils in WFB Schools

BAY BALL 4: Here's Looking at You!

What do you say to community members who strive to provide additional educational opportunities for their younger citizens? HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU! And this year, at Bay Ball 4, supporters of Whitefish Bay Schools did just that! The gala, held on November 14 at the Midwest Express Center, raised \$81,500, with each district school receiving \$16,400.

Bay Ball 4 funds will be used to develop THE BALL ROOM in each school: a location, room, space or area where all students will have the opportunity to increase learning opportunities by receiving additional training, support, or instruction, based on individual need. Examples of Bay Ball funding will be in the area of hardware/software programs such as the current WATERFORD reading support program at the elementary schools, and the NOVANET program at the High School. Other funding needs may include purchases of furniture (tables, chairs, desks), divider walls for privacy and additional technology hardware and software.

THE BALL ROOM will offer each school the opportunity to develop technology and/or teaching programs so all students can increase learning. All items purchased with Bay Ball funds will have an identifying plaque to commemorate the efforts of the community to enhance education in Whitefish Bay.

President's column cont'd

opposition to promoting higher academic expectations and accountability. I yield to no one in my support of these goals. I also believe strongly, however, that academic excellence is best achieved by policies fashioned at the local level to match the needs of a particular community - and not by "one-size-fits-all" policies that are decreed by state bureaucrats and that are subject to change depending on the prevailing political winds.

To counter these disturbing trends, I ask you to contact Governor Thompson to let him know that you support preserving the parent option provision that is now contained in the state graduation test law. Also, please consider contacting others as described in Connie and Meredith's nearby article. Your voice will be heard. This issue is vitally important not only in its own right but also as a way for us to begin to stop the erosion of local control.

Jay Miller (414) 962-1588

Whitefish Bay School District Approves Full Day Senior Kindergarten Option

Commitment to Part Day Option Maintained

Whitefish Bay School District will offer a six hour senior kindergarten option beginning with the 1999-2000 school year. The school board also stated in its resolution that it supports maintaining a part day program as a viable option for families. Towards that end, the school board decided to extend the part day program by one half hour (from 2 1/2 to 3 hours) and to offer the part day program as a separate program, not embedded in the full day class. Both full and part day options will be offered at each elementary school every year, and classes will be formed if there are a minimum of twelve students enrolled.

As this newsletter went to press, 29 families at Cumberland registered for the half day program for next year, and 58 registered for the full day. At Richards, 48 families registered for the part day, and 55 registered for the full day.

Speak Out!

Call or write your elected officials and express your education concerns.

Governor Tommy Thompson
P.O. Box 7863
Madison, WI 53707
(608) 266-1212
(608) 267-8983 -fax

State Senator Alberta Darling
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882
(800) 863-1113
sen.darling@legis.state.wi.us

Representative Sheldon Wasserman
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953
(888) 534-0022
rep.wasserman@legis.state.wi.us

Governor Proposes Eliminating Parent Options for High School Graduation Test

by Connie Gavin and Meredith Scrivner

Governor Thompson recently announced plans to eliminate a parent's right to have his or her child excused from the high school graduation test and evaluated under alternative criteria developed by the local school district. Governor Thompson believes that all students should demonstrate their mastery of Wisconsin's new academic standards by taking and passing the Wisconsin high school graduation test in order to receive a high school diploma.

For as long as Wisconsin has mandated state tests, parents have had the option of excusing their children from the tests. The original supporters of the concept believed that parents know their children best. Some children simply are not good test takers, or have other extenuating circumstances. The elimination of the parent option would eliminate choices and flexibility for parents and families, as well as result in questionable public policy.

Less than two years ago, inclusion of the parent option was crucial to the passage of the graduation test requirement. The high school graduation test is frequently referred to as a high stakes test, in that a student must pass it in order to receive a diploma. **If the parent option is eliminated, the state high school graduation test will be the sole measure of performance for every single student in Wisconsin, with some very limited exceptions. This is simply not fair or sensible.**

The state graduation test is currently in the development stage. DPI insists that it will not be a minimum competency test, but a rigorous test intended to raise the bar for achievement in Wisconsin. The level of complexity of published sample questions in all subject areas is quite high. (See sample questions on page 6.) No one knows yet what percentage of correct answers will be required to pass each section of the test.

The Department of Public Instruction has requested over ten million dollars for the next budget period to develop and administer the graduation test. DPI anticipates that the test will last about fourteen hours and will be administered at least two times per year over several days in every local high school district. Students must achieve a passing score on each of the four sections of the test in order to receive a high

school diploma. Only students enrolled in a special education program or limited English speaking students may be excused under the statute (or have the test modified for them.) There may also be a statutory basis for DPI to modify the test for students with exceptional educational needs.

The governor's office responds to concerns about eliminating the parent option before the test is even written and passing levels are established by noting that local districts are free to adopt their own test, as permitted by statute. Given that the cost of developing a test is in the millions of dollars, and revenue caps prohibit districts from raising new funds, developing a local test is clearly not an option for any but the largest districts. (Interestingly, Milwaukee Public Schools has developed its own graduation test and does not intend to use the state high school graduation test.)

The parent option is an important safeguard for families. Without it, there is no relief from the high school graduation test requirement, except in very limited exceptional educational needs situations. Some flexibility is particularly important for such students as:

- the student who "freezes" on tests
- the student who can read adequately but slowly and therefore cannot finish the test in the allotted time
- the student who understands concepts but has difficulty retrieving detailed facts
- the student who wishes to pursue a curriculum highly intensive in an area like fine arts
- the student with such conditions as attention deficit disorder, Section 504 disabilities, or countless other conditions which make a long test very difficult but which do not warrant accommodation under the testing law
- the student who pursues a vocational curriculum
- the student who is generally very capable but has great difficulty with one area such as math
- the student whose family objects to standardized testing on religious or philosophical grounds.

There are many unanswered questions with this reform initiative, and our children will be caught up in the experiment with no safeguard if the parent option is eliminated. **Current eighth grade students will be the first group required to pass the test in order to graduate.**

Here are some questions to consider:

- How many Wisconsin students will drop out of school because they fear that there is no way they will be able to pass this test? What will become of these students?
- Will our school districts turn into massive test preparation centers where real learning is available only for those who will clearly have no trouble passing any portion of the test, and everyone else spends their time on remediation and test preparation? How will districts allocate limited revenue between regular learning activities and test preparation and remediation?
- How will teachers in the classroom feel about their careers and ability to contribute meaningfully to young people's lives if their role is reduced to test strategies and learning just what the student needs to know for the test?
- Where is it demonstrated that focusing a high school career on passing a high stakes test will result in excited, well prepared, intellectually curious lifelong learners?
- What about all of the children in Wisconsin who for whatever reason, have the knowledge and skills they need for their post high school career path (college or otherwise) but will not pass every portion of this test? Will this not result in even greater differentiation between the haves and have nots in our society?
- Will more parents who see that their child has a problem, for whatever reason, with standardized tests (or one subject area) bail out of the public schools rather than have their child's entire high school career spent preparing for this test?
- Does the governor fear that parents will use this option to thwart efforts to improve education in Wisconsin? If parents exercise the option, their child does not automatically have a "free ticket" to graduate. The local school board must then determine graduation eligibility based on alternative criteria, which would be developed as school district policy in advance of any individual decision.
- How can Wisconsin justify eliminating the parent option in light of new programs touting parental choice and parental responsibility? (Interestingly, students attending private schools through the state funded choice program are not required to demonstrate their performance through any tests, including the high school graduation test.) Why

should an important option for public school parents be eliminated at the same time parents are being provided more private school options?

- Wisconsin's successful educational system is founded on a rich tradition of local control. Eliminating the parent option with regard to the high school graduation test is one more step towards a state run, state paid for school system which cannot know or possibly meet the varying needs of children or respect the educational priorities of local communities.

Governor Thompson's proposal to eliminate the parent option to determine that a high stakes test is not right for a given child will be included in the new budget bill introduced to the legislature in February and the legislature will take action on it in the next few months. If parents want to preserve this flexibility for their children we must take immediate action. If you have a child in the fourth through eighth grade, you should be very concerned about this issue.

How can you make a difference? Advocates for Education and the Whitefish Bay School District have been working with Senator Alberta Darling and Representative Sheldon Wasserman, and both strongly support preserving the parental option. We need letters and phone calls and email messages to Governor Thompson and other legislators, particularly those on the Joint Finance Committee and the Senate and Assembly Education Committees. If you are willing to help, Advocates for Education will provide sample letters and other help.

We also need to identify parents in other legislative districts who would be willing to read this article and call or write their legislators urging their continued support of the ability of parents to choose alternative graduation criteria. Think of friends in other communities who care about public education who might be willing to take action.

If you are interested in helping, please call Meredith Scrivner at 332-1377, email: scrivner@aero.net; or Connie Gavin at 332-8259, email: ckgavin@execpc.com. **We can make a difference, working together, and the time for action is right now.**

PARENT GROUPS INCREASE INVOLVEMENT

Whitefish Bay schools work to enhance parental involvement through groups based at each of the four schools.

The Cumberland School Parent Advisory Board has been restructured this year to include teacher representatives, and is now known as the Parent/Teacher Council. Parent and teacher representatives meet monthly with Principal Randy Hawley. Each grade level has a parent representative appointed for a two-year term, while the teacher representatives rotate among grade level chairs. The purposes of the council are to share ideas and concerns between school and home, provide the principal with parental feedback, and provide a forum for discussing possible changes in curriculum, services and environment.

Last year, the council's efforts focused on revamping the year-end survey which parents complete regarding their children's classroom experiences. This year the group is working on the following projects: improving acoustics in the cafeteria and reducing sound in the hallways, improving the effectiveness of parent/teacher orientation, and discussing homework policies at each grade level.

At Richards School, the Leadership Team is comprised of Principal Elaine Gehring, Grade Level Chairpersons, Subject Area Chairpersons in EEN/Specialist Areas and parent representatives from each grade level. The team's mission is to provide leadership to improve the quality of education for the students, to promote a climate where leadership skills can emerge to create positive change within the school, and to respond to the community.

Last year, Leadership Team projects included restructuring the lunch schedules to reduce congestion, co-sponsoring, with the PTA, a "Buddy Family Program" to welcome new families, and initiating a policy requiring visitor sign-in. This year, the team will meet six times and is working on the following projects: improving orientation, designating a time prior to the beginning of school when students and parents could meet teachers and see their new classrooms, and improving the transition between class years.

Gifted and Talented Curriculum Committee to report to WFB School Board

A curriculum committee has been reviewing the WFB gifted and talented program. The committee's recommendations will be presented to the school board:

**Wednesday, March 24 at 7:00 p.m.
in Room 47 of the WFB High School**

Public comment is always welcome.

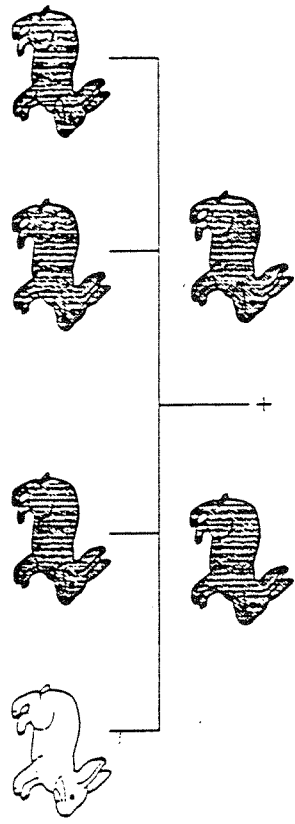
At the Middle School, the goal of the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) is to connect parents with the school. The group meets monthly and sponsors many activities, such as the Fall Family Social and Teacher Appreciation. The PTO produces a monthly newsletter and the student directory, and raises funds to provide cultural arts activities for students. The PTO also sponsors "Chats with the Principal" which give parents an opportunity to discuss school policies, activities and curriculum with Principal JoAnn Truss in an informal setting.

The High School Parents' Association provides a link between home and school for high school parents. The group meets monthly and meetings are open to anyone interested in the high school. Each month, Principal Neil Codell gives a comprehensive report on high school news and activities, and faculty representatives from academic departments rotate in attending the meeting to provide information and answer questions. The Parents' Association also sponsors four parent forums per year, which are held in private homes. Parents can attend any or all of the forums and discuss topics of interest with Mr. Codell, members of the guidance staff and teachers.

The Parents' Association is responsible for many other high school activities, such as Post Prom, Grad Grams, and Grad Night. The group also produces the student directory, and helps to organize school events such as student registration in the late summer and parent/teacher conferences in November.

SCIENCE EXAMPLE

The diagram below shows the phenotype (physical characteristics) of two generations of rabbits. Suppose a dominant gene "C" carries the trait for gray fur, and a recessive gene "c" carries the trait for white fur.



Which square shows the genetic makeup of the two generations of rabbits?

A

C	C
CC	CC
C	CC
CC	CC

B

C	C
CC	Cc
C	CC
CC	Cc

C

C	c
CC	Cc
c	Cc
cc	cc

D

c	c
cc	cc
c	cc
cc	cc

SOCIAL STUDIES EXAMPLE

"The official obeys whom he serves ... The official feels responsibility to his master alone and his master is the political machine of this party. The people whom he serves in theory, he may safely disobey."

- Robert M. La Follette, July 4, 1987

To which problem was La Follette referring?

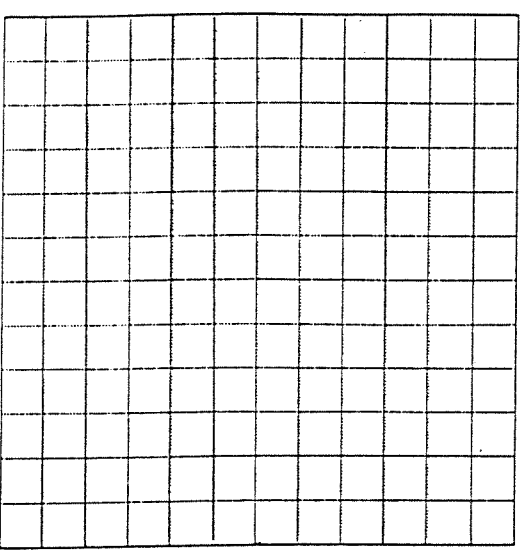
- A. The representative form of government was effective on the state level, but not on the local level.
- B. Campaign funding from foreign nations was causing corruption of government officials.
- C. The two-party system was becoming too powerful, and third-party candidates were unable to compete.
- D. **Elected officials were ignoring those who elected them.**

MATH EXAMPLE

The total projected profit in dollars (p) of a landscaping company is given by the equation $p = x^2 - 30x + 6000$, where x represents the number of employees.

PART A

Graph this equation on the grid below. Use positive values for x . Be sure to label the axes and use correct scales.



PART B

Use your graph to determine what the company's minimum profit would be.

Answer

DID YOU KNOW...

? The Whitefish Bay Human Growth and Development Advisory Council is a group of parents, teachers, students, administrators and community members appointed by the School Board to review and approve all policy matters and instructional materials used in the Human Growth and Development curriculum. Current parent representatives are: Paula Lorant (HS), Rita Weinberg (HS), Kiara Whitcomb (MS), Linda Holoway (MS), Rhonda Oberland (C), Jackie Turkal (C), Dr. Judy Guinn (R), Caryn Blegen (R). Parent feedback on the Human Growth and Development program is always welcomed by the Advisory Council.

? The United States Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of a Wisconsin Supreme Court decision regarding the constitutionality of the Milwaukee school choice program. The choice program, which allows low income Milwaukee families to receive tuition vouchers from the state to pay tuition at religious or private non-sectarian schools, was found constitutional by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The Supreme Court's refusal to hear an appeal means that the state court decision stands.

? Incumbents Pam Woodard and Tim Somers are running uncontested for reelection to the two school board seats up in this spring's election. Election day falls on Tuesday, April 6, which is during Whitefish Bay's spring break. Absentee ballots will be available at Village Hall in mid-March, and are simple to fill out and send in ahead of time. Don't forget to vote!!

? Jeffrey Foran and John Hainze have been appointed as parent members of the Whitefish Bay science curriculum review committee.

? Tourism industry officials and legislators representing tourism communities have renewed their efforts to pass a state law prohibiting all school districts from opening prior to September 1. Tourism communities rely on the high school age work force and would like to extend the family vacation season. Most education groups, including the Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, oppose a state mandated school start date, particularly where there is no educational basis for the decision. The tourism lobby is working very hard on this issue, and has already introduced legislation for the new session.

Our Mission

Advocates for Education is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that works to promote high quality public education in Whitefish Bay by:

- **informing** residents about education issues and encouraging public participation in matters affecting the schools;
- **fostering** a social and political climate favorable to public education;
- **advocating** for public policies that promote high quality public education in Whitefish Bay.

1998-99 AFE Board of Directors

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Advocates for Education thanks all of you who have newly joined in the effort to promote high quality public education in Whitefish Bay. We also appreciate the continued confidence our renewing members have demonstrated in the organization. We need the ongoing support of those committed to public education in our community to remain a strong, member driven organization.

It's not too late to join Advocates for Education for the 1998-99 school year!

Please complete the form below, detach and mail with your check to:

Sandy Pasch
6301 N. Berkeley
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217

Please encourage a friend or neighbor to join. We can make a difference, all of us, working together.



Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Membership is \$15 per household

Check here if you do **not** wish to be included in a directory for members

Join or renew today to receive the next Advocates for Education newsletter!