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solely or primarily to earn the extra weight.

- There are inequities among how the weights are applied.

As noted in the proposal, the reason for offering weighted grades is that the classes are truly more demanding. The pace and level of coursework is intended to simulate college level classes.

Students may be reluctant to take on an AP class and the higher challenge and workload if they fear it will negatively impact their grade point average. If fewer students take AP classes, the number of offerings could decline and the reputation of the high school, some would argue, would diminish.

Also, if Whitefish Bay eliminates class rank but does provide colleges with the grade point distribution for the class, making it possible for admis-

sions counselors to still extrapolate rank, the argument for retaining weighted grades for fairness in ranking remains even if the official class rank is eliminated.

The impact of these changes depends in part on the varied admissions procedures of colleges.

The school board is expected to consider these proposals as early as this spring. Call the district office at 963- 3921 to receive agendas for upcoming meetings. Copies of the written proposals are available at the district office.

Advocates for Education will not take a position as a group on these issues, but encourages the community to be informed and participate in the decision-making process. ❖



Advocates *for* EDUCATION *of Whitefish Bay, Inc.*

February 2002

Neither Excelling nor Struggling: **WFB STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE**

Since September, groups of students, staff, parents, and members of the Whitefish Bay community have been engaged in a year-long process intended to set the future direction of the School District of Whitefish Bay. One of the issues that has emerged from these discussions is the needs of "kids in the middle," those who are neither excelling nor struggling in their day-to-day educational lives.

While the school board has yet to decide if this issue will receive its focused attention in the final plan, district administrator James Rickabaugh urged all involved to realize that the subject is more complex than it appears at first glance.

Even defining who are the students "in the middle" is difficult, he said, because the profile of Whitefish Bay students varies greatly from that of the average U. S. school district. Whitefish Bay students bring considerable

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assets to the educational process, Rickabaugh noted, and average Whitefish Bay students would often be considered high achievers in another situation, something they sometimes discover when they leave the district.

Rickabaugh also cautioned educators and parents to avoid assuming that average students are a monolithic group. Such students are often not average in all skill areas, he said. They may be very strong in one area and more in the middle in others. Their area of strength may be due to a discipline-specific talent or merely the result of discovering an activity which better fits their learning style, he explained.

Students also develop at different rates, so some will not discover their strengths until later, sometimes not until after they've left the district, Rickabaugh said. The desire to excel may also be sparked by an influential person,

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MISSION Statement

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.

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As I write this column, the State of Wisconsin is facing a \$1.1 billion budget shortfall. The budget adjustment proposal unveiled in late January by Governor McCallum would leave K-12 funding largely intact, but many significant issues will have to be resolved before any proposal can be finally approved. It is also possible that whatever devices are employed to bridge the gap we currently face will be only temporary. That would leave final resolution of our budget crisis to another day, probably after the gubernatorial election this fall.

Given this backdrop and the impact of K-12 funding on our state budget (K-12 funding accounted for 48.5% of the entire state budget in 2001), it is inevitable that at some point, attempts will be made to change the school funding formula, either wholesale or in part. Even before the current budget crisis, Gov. McCallum and others in state government had called for a comprehensive review of the state's school funding system.

Obviously, changes in our school funding system could have a significant impact on the quality and content of education in our district and other districts around the state.

Advocates for Education is committed to staying in touch with elected representatives and others who are in a position to influence this process and to providing its members with the most up-to-date information possible. Our Co-Vice Presidents for Advocacy, Cheryl Maranto and Barbara Beckert, along with Rachel Taknint, AFE member and former board member, spend many volunteer hours enabling us to keep this commitment, by attending meetings, testifying in front of state legislative committees, contacting elected and state administrative officials and reviewing legislation, all with the perspective of maintaining high quality public education.

In addition, plans are underway for Advocates to co-sponsor a forum on education issues for gubernatorial candidates in mid-May. Watch your mailboxes for more information as this event takes shape.

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but these people appear throughout students' lives, not just in the school setting, he added. Finally, he said, students may be distracted by non-academic issues, and only the resolution of these issues will unleash their full potential.

Consequently, the district's response must be "multifaceted and thoughtful," Rickabaugh said, "not just a matter of adding courses and opportunities."

Because we live in a competitive culture, we will always define ourselves by comparison, he noted, but it is the job of adults to help students recognize what they are accomplishing rather than just focusing on what they lack.

"We need to send a consistent message that effort and persistence in the face of challenges is a key contributor to success in life," he urged. "We also need to look more broadly at students' lives when we define achievement."

He is fearful, however, of establishing any set of rewards which could be perceived as "Tier 2." Excellence cannot be judged in isolation, Rickabaugh believes. The skills and abilities valued by the larger society ought to serve as benchmarks for any definition of achievement.

The district's job, he believes, is "to create multiple paths to success with multiple entry points but not multiple levels." He cited as an example the recent revision of the process by which students are selected to take Advanced Placement English.

In the past only students who were selected in eighth grade and enrolled in accelerated English for three years took AP English in their senior year. Beginning next year, students who have earned a grade of A in English in both

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semesters of junior year and have their teachers' recommendations may also enroll in AP.

The task of teaching also demands that educators find ways to "provide richer experiences" and to help students "learn more deeply," he said. "When students engage with the content, they learn it better."

Rickabaugh believes that integrating technology is one way of meeting the needs of a diverse student body and individualizing instruction without overtaxing the district's already limited human

and financial resources.

The goal is to balance the needs of all students, helping each to reach his or her full potential, the superintendent said. Because Whitefish Bay already provides a substantial number of opportunities for talented students who learn best by conventional methods as well as fairly strong support systems for students who struggle, the danger may be complacency. The question must always be, he said, "What do they need that they're not getting?" ❖

Vous Dites la Tomate, Y Digo el Tomate

During this first year of the Whitefish Bay School District's elementary foreign language program, one frequently heard question is, "Why are Cumberland students learning Spanish and Richards students learning French?"

According to Director of Instruction Tony Frontier, parent surveys conducted in spring, 2000, during the district's curriculum review process, showed that parents consistently ranked the quality of an elementary foreign language program as more important than the language taught. These results were consistent with the curriculum committee's research conclusion that the benefits of learning a foreign language extend beyond learning that specific language. Learning one language, the committee believed, gives students the skill and ability to learn other languages. Also, in looking at other programs, the committee concluded that quality of instruction is the key to the success of a program.

When the Whitefish Bay School District advertised for candidates to fill the two newly created elementary world language positions, there was not a preference for a particular language. Twenty-seven candidates were interviewed, and the two strongest candidates were hired. One happened to teach Spanish, and the other, French.

If one of the teachers left the district, the district would try to replace that person with the same language, in order to build on the established program. However, whether these languages would be continued would depend on the hiring circumstances at the time. Fortunately, there is considerable depth in the candidate pool of French and Spanish elementary teachers.

The district has not resolved yet the issue of what changes will be needed at the middle school when the students who have had foreign language instruction in elementary school reach sixth grade. ❖

TODAY

JOIN

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

Join the team of voices speaking on behalf of children to provide the best public education possible.

Active Member(s)
(WFB resident or parent/gardian of WFB School District student)
@ \$20 per household

Supporting Member(s)
@ \$20 per household

I am interested in volunteering for AFE. Please call me.

Enclosed is an additional donation to support AFE. Due to the lobbying mission of AFE, donations are not tax-deductible.
\$ _____ donation enclosed.

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join

Please detach this form and mail today to:

Meredith Scrivner
4626 N. Cramer Street
Whitefish Bay, WI
53211.

Graduation Test: Governor Proposes Delay

In his budget adjustment bill introduced in February, Governor Scott McCallum proposed a two-year delay of the effective date of Wisconsin's high school graduation test. If this proposal passes the legislature, as expected, the current eighth graders, rather than the current sophomores, would be the first students affected by the law. However, many people believe this delay will eventually result in elimination of the high school graduation test altogether.

The Department of Public Instruction cancelled an April, 2002 initial administration of the test. This move restores four testing days to days of instruction at all Wisconsin high schools.

DPI hopes to use questions developed for the graduation test to improve the tenth grade Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Test. Wisconsin owns the questions it has developed with the testing company for the graduation test.

The current state budget shortfall is one of the reasons the test delay is likely to become law. Millions of dollars are needed in this biennium to complete development and initial administration of the test.

Last year the legislature demonstrated its lack of support for the test by refusing to fund the test's administration for the next biennium and voting to delay its effective date. However, last year Governor McCallum vetoed the delay that he is now proposing. All of these factors point to the likelihood that the delay will become law. If so, it will be very difficult for test proponents to rally support for funding the test in the future.

Your Help is Needed

While this proposal seems likely to pass, there are certainly no guarantees in politics. Many Advocates for Education members have advocated effectively against the graduation test. Please write one more letter today, addressed to the Chairmen of the Joint Finance Committee. Your letter can be quite short. Ask these legislative leaders to support the proposal to delay the effective date of the high school graduation test, and to use the money for other worthy education programs. Mail your letters to Senator Brian Burke, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882 and to Representative John Gard, P.O. Box 8952, Madison, WI 53708-8952. Email to legislators is not as effective as a letter, but their email addresses are Sen.Burke@legis.state.wi.us and Rep.Gard@legis.state.wi.us.

UW Regents

Also, in December, the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents voted to delay indefinitely its earlier decision to require the graduation test for admission to UW schools, citing uncertainty about the test's future and concerns about the equitable treatment of all students applying to UW schools.

Many people believe this delay will eventually result in elimination of the high school graduation test altogether.

Five Years of Advocacy

Advocates for Education led the statewide effort to change the original high stakes graduation test law, and facilitated the efforts of many people to make their voices heard on this issue. Advocates for Education is grateful to everyone who has helped over the past five years to:

- ensure that major decisions in the life of a child are not made on the basis of a single test;
- preserve the statutory right of parents to opt their children out of the test;
- maintain local control of curriculum;
- keep students on the task of learning rather than test taking; and
- continue to emphasize meaningful learning rather than teaching to the test.

The effort made throughout the state on this issue is a model of what well-informed individuals can accomplish if they are willing to take action, and how an organization like Advocates for Education can facilitate that effort.

Please take the time to make one more contact (letter or email) in opposition to the high school graduation test. Together, we can make a difference.❖

TIME FOR A CHANGE?

Class rank and weighted grades would be eliminated under two separate proposals recently made to the Whitefish Bay School Board by high school principal Bill Henkle and the guidance staff. Class rank would be eliminated beginning with the class of 2003. Weighted grades would be eliminated beginning with the current freshman class.

Class Rank Issue Returns

The school board considered the issue of class rank in some detail last year, but no recommendation for change was made then.

Among the reasons cited in the current proposal for eliminating class rank are:

- Ninety percent of Whitefish Bay High School students apply to four-year colleges, compared to less than 50% of all students in Wisconsin. This makes it harder for Whitefish Bay students to achieve higher comparative class ranks. A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 (a B) for a member of the class of 2001 is barely in the top 60% of the class.
- If no class rank is provided, colleges will focus more on the student's grades and admission test scores. The proposal argues that this will help Whitefish Bay students because "the majority of them earn good grades and our ACT scores are consistently among the highest in the state and nation." Opponents to the proposal argue that some colleges will discount grades if there is no class rank, so much more emphasis will be placed on standardized test scores.
- Eliminating class rank may reduce stress and competition.
- Other schools with a strong college preparatory focus and a high level of academic achievement, such as Marquette High and University School, do not rank their students. (However, comparable public schools do.)

The proposal does not indicate whether the high school would provide class grade distribution information, if requested by colleges. This information would allow colleges to roughly calculate a student's rank in the class. Many colleges request

this information if no class rank is provided. Some high schools will provide it and some will not.

For a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of the class rank issue, and its impact on college admission, see the Advocates for Education article *Class Rank: Gets Students in or Keeps Them Out?* in the February 2001 newsletter archived at www.advocatesforeducation.org.

Weighted Grades

Grade point average in Whitefish Bay is computed on the basis of a 4.0 scale. Currently, grades earned in advanced placement ("AP") classes are weighted so that an A is worth five rather than four grade points. Some AP prerequisite courses are weighted by one half point. The proposed change is to completely eliminate the use of weighted grades.

Following is a summary of the proposal for eliminating weighted grades:

- One of the arguments for weighted grades is to encourage students to choose academically challenging courses. The proposal asserts that there is sufficient incentive to take AP classes (i.e. college admission) to offset fears that a harder class may hurt a student's GPA without weighting. Also, some colleges recalculate GPA to exclude all weights and electives anyway.
- Another reason for using weighted grades is that the classes for which they are offered are harder and have a more demanding workload. The proposal argues that there are other sufficient rewards for completing the tougher course requirements, such as college level thinking and study skills, college credit and exemption from introductory college courses. Also, the proposal argues that if weight is based on workload, a student in a lower level class may be working harder than a student in an AP class.
- "Weighted grades can be divisive by giving the impression that those courses that are weighted are somehow superior to those that are not."
- Teachers' interest in teaching AP classes is diminished if they believe students are taking the class

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