



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

Winter 2009

www.advocatesforeducation.org

Three New School Board Members To Be Elected April 7

On April 7, Whitefish Bay voters will have a rare opportunity to elect three new members to its school board. Not only is this the one-in-every-three-years that three seats are open, it is the first time in recent history that all three incumbents have decided not to run for re-election.

Five candidates have registered to be on the ballot. They are Thomas DeMuth, Joseph Martinelli, Kathy Rogers, Geraldine (Gerry) Steele, and Deborah Frensz Taran. Voters will be asked to vote for three of the five candidates; the top three vote-getters will be elected to the School Board.

Tom DeMuth, Gerry Steele and Kathy Rogers were, until recently, members of the board of Advocates for Education. In the interest of fairness, and to assure that AFE continues its policy of neutrality in elections, Tom, Gerry and Kathy all resigned from the Board in January.

Advocates for Education urges you to learn about the candidates, their positions and their qualifications. **AFE will sponsor a candidates forum Thursday, March 26 at 7 p.m. at the Whitefish Bay Public Library.**

Most importantly, AFE urges you to vote and to consider your voting decisions carefully. Support those candidates whom you feel will best promote continued high-quality public education in Whitefish Bay. Vote April 7!

Meet the Candidates:

Tom DeMuth

Tom and his wife, Kathy, have lived in Whitefish Bay since 1998. They have three children, all of whom attend Whitefish Bay public schools. Garrett is a sophomore, Turner is a seventh grader and Riley is a third grader. Tom holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin

Whitewater and a Law Degree from the University of Wisconsin. Upon graduation from law school, he began practicing law at McDermott, Will & Emery in Chicago. After moving to Milwaukee he joined Godfrey & Kahn, S.C. as a shareholder in the firm's Real Estate Group.

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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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Don't Skip this Article... Even If You Are Tempted!

Spending caps... revenue caps... the QEO... tax caps... class size... local control... tax levy... levy credits... what in the world does all this mean? And why would someone ever try to figure it out?

Here's why: **Your child's education depends on it. And the value of your home depends on good schools.**

Although the whole Wisconsin public school funding system is an unbelievably complicated maze which few can navigate, there are some very basic principles which you need to know if you are interested in high quality public education. So give this a try.

There are two distinct factors which are important to schools and to taxpayers. One factor is **the amount of money we are allowed to spend**. The other factor is **where the money comes from**.

School districts are limited by law in the amount of money they are allowed to spend. These limits are called **revenue caps**. Unless a district passes a local referendum approving increased taxes for school spending, that district must spend no more than their state mandated spending limit in any given school year.

Public school funding comes from two main sources, state aid and local property taxes. The state aid is paid on a per pupil basis, in an amount directly related to the property wealth in a school district. Whitefish Bay receives approximately 35% of its school funding from the state. The remainder is provided through property tax dollars.

Whatever is not paid through state aid is made up for by local property taxes. This is why communities want as much state money as possible.

Because collective bargaining

became so challenging about 15 years ago, as resources decreased and needs increased, the state legislature included in the funding formula a provision called the **Qualified Economic Offer**, or QEO. The QEO law allows school boards to impose a set rate of increase for teacher salaries and benefits, if they can't come to a mutually acceptable agreement in the bargaining process. That set increase is 3.8% in any given year.

Due to the increasing costs of benefits, as well as the economic challenges faced by all people and businesses, a 3.8% increase is rarely satisfactory to the recipients.

Insurance costs often consume so much of the increase that salaries actually decrease for some teachers. For that and other reasons, imposing the QEO is never a very satisfactory solution for either the teachers or the district. It does, however, offer a guaranteed alternative to inevitable legal wrangling which would result between districts and teachers if a negotiated settlement could not be reached and the QEO option did not exist. Fortunately, Whitefish Bay has not had to impose the QEO for many years, but our challenges remain.

The **spending cap** is probably the most significant part of the school funding plan. On the plus side, the cap has been instrumental in containing property taxes. On the down side, it has been equally instrumental in limiting school districts' ability to decide for themselves what to spend on its students.

A frequent political cry is to **"get rid of the QEO."** This provision is, in fact, part of the 2009-2011 state budget proposed on February 18, 2009 by Governor Jim Doyle.

Often, those who call for elimination of the QEO do so with the idea of increasing teacher pay.

Ironically, this measure gets big play but would have little effect in increasing teacher pay, because districts would still be limited by the spending caps. However, the elimination of the QEO would actually open the door for paying less than the current 3.8% requirement. And, it definitely would open the door for costly, protracted arbitration if a negotiated settlement could not be reached and the QEO did not exist. Such arbitration is always difficult for everyone involved, and is both costly and distracting.

Recently, the Wisconsin School Finance Network, a coalition of state education organizations, has developed a proposal to revise the state's school funding formula. The state assembly will hold a hearing on the proposal March 24. Learn more about the Network and read the proposal in its entirety at <http://sfnwisconsin.org/>. Whitefish Bay is represented in the Network through its involvement in the Southeastern Wisconsin School Alliance, of which Bay School Board member, Cheryl Maranto, is currently co-president.

Most everyone who wants school funding reform has a primary viewpoint, whether it is better teacher pay, lower taxes, more money for strong schools, more money for weak schools, or any of a variety of goals. Those viewpoints inevitably clash. Advocates for Education tries to hold a moderate viewpoint of supporting the best possible education for students while being reasonable and realistic about economic constraints.

What can you do? **Try to understand the funding debate** and think about the challenges of today's world. The better you understand this complex and important subject, the more effective your voice will be.

Meet the Candidates

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Tom DeMuth, continued

In 2004, he left the practice of law and co-founded Lighthouse Development Company, a boutique real estate development company. When asked why he was running for School Board, Tom remarked: "Our District has done an excellent job educating its students over the last several decades, but we face immense new challenges in the global economy. I am running for School Board because I believe I can provide the vision necessary to help our children confront these challenges. The District also faces many issues such as potential budget deficits, rising salaries and benefit costs, the CDO lawsuit, the proposed facilities referendum, as well as many others. Given my background and experience, I believe I am uniquely qualified to assist our District in these matters. I am willing to make difficult decisions and will provide the leadership necessary to confront these issues."

Joseph (Joe) Martinelli

Joe moved to Whitefish Bay three and a half years ago from the San Juan Islands, northwest of Seattle. He and his wife, Karen, have three adopted grandchildren: Jazmine is in second grade at Richards School, Mike is in sixth grade at the Middle School and Tony is a freshman at the High School. After gaining custody of their grandchildren, Joe came to Whitefish Bay to be close to his extended family and because of the reputation of the schools. Joe holds an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh with an undergraduate and graduate study in Petroleum Engineering. He also earned an Executive Management Certificate at Carnegie Mellon University. After more than 40 years in the petroleum

industry, both domestically and internationally, Joe has held leadership positions in numerous industry associations and has been involved with education on many levels. He coordinated executive management programs at the Northwestern University Transportation Center in Evanston, IL, worked with the San Ramon Valley School District in the San Francisco Bay area to develop improvement programs in the district and managed organizations that constructed schools in California and Nigeria. Joe brings all of these experiences and interests to Whitefish Bay and his desire to run for a position on the School Board. He is running because: "he has a vested interest with three children in the system, he believes we all have the responsibility to improve our communities, to 'give something back', and he would like to apply his educational and professional background, his skills and experience in business, and help the district in meeting the future challenges it will face in any way he can."

Kathy Rogers

Kathy has been a resident of Whitefish Bay for 16 years. She is married to Dave Pritchard and they have a son, Chris, who is a sixth grader at Whitefish Bay Middle School. Kathy holds a BS in Secondary Education from UW Madison, a MS in Higher Education from Indiana University, a MS in Counseling from UW Milwaukee and is a certified teacher. Her professional background includes both high school and college teaching experiences, 18 years as a college administrator at Indiana University and MSOE and she has been a substitute teacher in the Shorewood and Whitefish Bay schools since 2002. She has served on the UWM Children's Center Advisory Board, been a parent representative for

the WFB Social Studies Curriculum Review Committee, a member of the Cumberland Parent-Teacher Council and has served on the Advocates for Education Board as both Secretary and President. When asked why she is running for School Board Kathy remarked: "All three board members elected in April will be new. This major change in the board's composition comes at a challenging time for public education. With so much of the board turning over, it is important that new board members be knowledgeable about educational issues. I believe my experience in teaching, administration and community service, as well as my knowledge of our district, will enable me to serve effectively on the School Board."

Gerry Steele

Gerry and her husband Chris have lived in Whitefish Bay for over 19 years. They have two children who attend the Middle School and High School and Gerry, herself, attended both Richards Kindergarten and Whitefish Bay High School. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Madison and currently a Corporate Event Manager. Her service to the community includes six years on the Advocates for Education Board and six years on the Whitefish Bay Civic Foundation Board along with a number of positions on the Richards PTO Board of Directors. When asked why she chose to run, Gerry replied, "We are facing increasingly difficult times in finding ways to deliver high quality public education in Whitefish Bay. The only way to continue the legacy of excellence is through strong leadership on the School Board with a team willing to provide thoughtful, long term planning, communication with all stakeholders, and fiscal responsibility."

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Meet the Candidates

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Debbie Frensz Taran

Debbie and her husband, Steve Frensz, have lived in Whitefish Bay for 20 years. Their daughter, Lindsey, is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin Madison and a third generation graduate from WFB High School. Their son, Casey, is currently a junior at the high school. Both children attended the Middle School and Cumberland Elementary. A graduate of Moorhead State College with a degree in Mass Communications led to Debbie's first career as a television news broadcaster. A passion-

ate interest in family and the love of learning led to 15 years of serving the community as "Miss Debbie" – a gym, art, golf instructor and crossing guard for the Whitefish Bay Recreation Department. Additional teaching experience includes leading early childhood activities at the JCC and substituting at St. Francis Children's Center. She is currently employed by The Greater Milwaukee Boys and Girls Club at the 81st Street School as a SPARKS reading tutor. Debbie is professionally molded by two decades of public service which included seven and a half years as manager of the Kenosha County 9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch Center and serving the City of Duluth, MN in personnel,

law enforcements and public relations. Debbie launched a write-in campaign for School Board last spring with hopes of generating community interest in this important role. She is pleased to be running with a slate of five candidates that will allow for diverse choice in our village. Debbie "is most proud of her 20 year dedication to her family in Whitefish Bay. She desires to continue her commitment by serving as an advocate for all Whitefish Bay students to insure their experience in our community and schools leaves a lasting positive impression. With looming economic issues and highly competitive academics, she will be a voice focused on conservatively placing students first."

New Grading Policy to Take Effect Next Year

Last year, the school board approved a revised policy on grading and developmental feedback that will go into effect in the 2009-2010 school year. The new policy applies to all grades, K-12, although there are different components for K-5 than for 6-12.

According to Tony Frontier, Director of Instruction, the District's Focus Plan guided the creation of the new policy. The Focus Plan was developed several years ago after numerous focus group meetings among parents, teachers, students and administrators. The Focus Plan's four goals are to ensure that every student: Develops effective strategies for continuous learning, is presented with multiple options and opportunities for success, experiences a supportive learning environment, and is prepared for the future (additional information about the Focus Plan is also posted on the District website.) Providing quality feedback to students is central to the goals of the Focus Plan. While the former grading policy allowed for great variety in evaluative practice, the current policy emphasizes aligned grading prac-

tices across grade levels and departments that should make grading practices "more consistent, valid, and fair," Frontier said.

The new policy was developed by the District's Curriculum Evaluation Council, administrative team, and teaching staff, Frontier said. "The Professional Development

To read the District's new grading policy, as well as a Q&A with Director of Instruction, Tony Frontier, visit www.wfbschools.com and click on the link for director of curriculum/instruction.

Committee, Curriculum Evaluation Council, and teaching staff have been working on this topic for about four years, and we are now well positioned to implement the policy."

Departments, teaching teams and grade levels are working with principals to finalize policies that are consistent with the new District policy. These are to be completed by May and publicized next year.

Many people have asked whether

the new policy means that homework can no longer be graded. According to Frontier, the answer is no. The policy's wording on this subject reads: "Grades shall reflect student progress through a variety of assessments including, but not limited to such things as: in-class assignments and activities, homework assignments, portfolios or work samples, research projects, authentic performance assessments, quizzes, tests and examinations."

There have also been questions as to whether there is a new homework policy, but again, Frontier said, the answer is no. "There has been some confusion about that, but the homework policy has not been revised," Frontier said. The District's homework policy is also posted on the District webpage.

In addition to consulting the policies and supporting documents on the District website, parents with questions about the new grading policy may contact their children's principals or Tony Frontier, Director of Instruction, at 963-3927.

Moody's Reconfirms A Strong Credit Rating For The School District

Moody's Investor's Service recently reanalyzed the financial condition of the Whitefish Bay School District and reaffirmed its Aa2 credit rating. This rating is the second highest category available and is awarded to only a small number of school districts across the state of Wisconsin.

Moody's examined the school district's Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) investment that is the subject of a pending lawsuit and concluded the school district's financial condition remains investment worthy. Moody's Investor's Service pointed to a long history of strong financial management of the school district, its low debt structure and healthy fund balance as reasons for its positive conclusion.

The analysts noted that even a "worse case scenario", where the entire amount of invested funds would be lost and the lawsuit was unsuccessful, is manageable. The school district has accumulated adequate funds in the Post Employment Benefit Trust and maintains an operating reserve substantial enough to weather the loss and still have reserves available. As a result, annual financial operations would not suffer a significant negative impact.

AFE Thanks Long-Serving School Board Members

Advocates for Education thanks Whitefish Bay's three retiring School Board members who, together, have served our district for 36 years! Nancy LeGrand and David Kern will step down after five terms each, and John Hainze will finish after two terms. All three have been members of AFE at one time or another. We join the community in thanking them for their dedication and service to our students and our schools.



DID YOU FORGET?

RENEW

TODAY!

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

*Continue to be part of the team
of voices speaking on behalf of
children.*

- Active Member(s) (WFB resident or parent/guardian of WFB School District student) @ \$20 per household
- Supporting Member(s) @ \$20 per household
- Enclosed is an additional donation to support AFE. Due to the lobbying mission of AFE, donations are not tax-deductible.
- I am interested in volunteering for AFE. Please call me.

\$ _____ donation enclosed.

Total enclosed:

\$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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State & Zip _____

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Send this form today to:

**AFE
PO Box 170123
Milwaukee, WI 53217**

AFE to Sponsor School Board Candidate Forum

Advocates for Education
will sponsor a forum featuring
the five candidates for School Board at
7 p.m. Thursday, March 26
at the Whitefish Bay Public Library.

The forum will be moderated
by former School Board member,
Bruce Kestelman.

It is free and open to the public.

Did you know
*that you can access
School Board meetings
and supporting materials
online?*

Go to the District home-
page and click on "school
board" on the left!

AFE *welcomes
new members*

Eric Kaplan
Deborah and Ed Kohn
Jill and Patrick Marget
Nancy Pomes