

Save the date

AFE Annual Meeting

***Conversation, refreshments, quick votes!
Thursday, May 31st, 7 p.m.
Gallery 505, 505 E. Silver Spring Dr.***

Advocates for Education members and friends are invited to join outgoing and incoming AFE board members for the organization's annual meeting, set for Thursday, May 31st at Gallery 505. Members will approve the 2007-2008 roster of board members, thank the outgoing board and enjoy refreshments and conversation. Special thanks to gallery owner Tom Harris for making the space available. The work of Whitefish Bay High School artists will be on display as part of the gallery's "Creative Self-Expression" show.

Visit

www.advocatesforeducation.org

***The Advocates for Education of
Whitefish Bay Website***

***An independent source of information and discussion
for parents of children in Whitefish Bay Schools***

***AFE forums & coffees
Links to education resources
AFE newsletter archives covering curriculum,
testing, class size and more
School funding updates
Teacher & administrator profiles***



Advocates *for* EDUCATION of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

Spring 2007

www.advocatesforeducation.org

Positive Advocacy for WFB Schools: AFE SHOWS THE WAY

Message from the AFE president

This has been a productive school year for AFE. We held events on a wide range of topics. In November and March forums, we explored the “great expectations” placed on our children in a competitive academic environment, and the benefits of focusing on “learning over grades.” In February, we hosted living room coffees with small groups of engaged parents to learn about the complicated school funding system in Wisconsin. Throughout the year, we sent newsletters and email alerts to our members addressing budget issues, changes to the schools’ gifted and talented program, and school board elections.

Our membership level increased considerably this school year, to more than 150 Whitefish Bay families. Our mailing list includes elected leaders from Whitefish Bay to Madison to Washington, D.C. Legislators continue to tell us that when AFE speaks out, they listen.

The 2007-2008 school year will bring new challenges to Whitefish Bay schools. The district will retire several million dollars in long-term debt in

the next few years. As a result, the district will become virtually “debt-free” in terms of its long-term obligations. This presents many opportunities and challenges for our schools and our village. The district has formed a “Facilities Study Committee” composed of school board members, parents and administrators, to explore a wide variety of options. Should the district incur new long-term debt as an investment in our schools over the next 15 years? If the answer is yes, where should the money go? Upgrades to 75-year-old infrastructure? New space for performing arts? Remodeling of existing space? (Read more about the committee in the article in this newsletter.)

In the coming school year, answers will start taking shape. At AFE, we will follow these Whitefish Bay issues closely and engage our members in these important discussions.

This is an exciting time for our district, and we look to next year with great expectations.

–David Froiland



ASK KIDS WHAT THEY LEARNED, NOT HOW THEY DID ON THE TEST

AFE Forum takes focus off grades

Advocates for Education’s second forum of the school year tackled the pressure many students face to get good grades in high-achieving districts like Whitefish Bay. District Administrator Jim Rickabaugh and Director of Curriculum/Instruction Tony Frontier prepared a presentation highlighting an emphasis on effort over ability to teach children

the value of real learning.

The forum, titled Balancing Act: Focusing on Learning Over Grades, took place March 22nd at the Whitefish Bay Public Library.

In Asian cultures, Rickabaugh pointed out, the focus is on persistence to gain success, not “God-given ability.” Instead of being told how smart they are, children are praised

for their hard work. Frontier added that research shows grades do not provide effective feedback for students. Many children see the grade at the top of the paper and shut down. Comments about students’ work, he said, are much more effective.

The administrators suggested parents ask their children, “What did you

Continued on page 2...

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

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay

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ASK KIDS WHAT THEY LEARNED...

...continued from page 1

learn today?" instead of, "What did you do today?" then follow up with, "Teach me what you learned."

A panel of teachers and guidance counselors were on hand to answer questions. Parents asked how to handle children who are "praise junkies," and about Advanced Placement classes geared to the AP test. Others pointed out the reality of competition to get into college and succeed in the workplace. Administrators responded that the school district must find a balance between teaching students the value of learning and preparing them for a competitive college environment.

AFE PROFILES:

DAVID FROILAND & KRISTIN YUNKER

Outgoing Advocates for Education president David Froiland and incoming president Kristin Yunker share a commitment to public education in Whitefish Bay. David will serve as a vice president for advocacy on the AFE board next year.



DAVID FROILAND

David Froiland and his wife, Lisa Bates Froiland, are parents of Maddie, a Richards fourth grader, and Betsy, a first grader. David has degrees from St. Olaf College in Minnesota and Indiana University Law School. David and Lisa moved to Wisconsin from Florida, where David had a clerkship. Foley & Lardner lured the family to Milwaukee; David is now a partner in the firm's Labor and Employment Practice Group.

Of Whitefish Schools, David says, "I am very impressed by the way the schools cultivate peer-to-peer interaction, as early as kindergarten, so students respond thoughtfully to each other's work. I like that my kids are learning 'meta-skills' too. They come home reading about reading and thinking about thinking. When your first grader explains the 'text-to-text' connection she made between two books, it's not only because she's a good student; it's also because she has great teachers and a great curriculum"

As vice president for advocacy for AFE in the 2007-2008 school year, David will follow developments in Madison and Whitefish Bay that affect funding and policy in Whitefish Bay schools. He says volunteering for AFE is important. "Aside from perhaps the school board, no other organization has a district-wide focus on the issues that affect our schools. AFE is a great way to remain 'in the know'."



KRISTIN YUNKER

Kristin Yunker will be president of Advocates for Education for the 2007-2008 school years. She's a stay-at-home mother with a master's degree from UW-Milwaukee in second language acquisition and teaching English as a second language.

Kristin and her husband, Brian, have two children attending Cumberland School. Madeline is a third grader; Max is in first grade.

Kristin and Brian came to Wisconsin after facing an easy decision just two weeks after their wedding. Brian was offered either a tour of duty with his reserve Special Forces unit in Bosnia, or a chance to accept a promotion and move from Chicago to Milwaukee. The couple chose Milwaukee, and were attracted to Whitefish Bay by the small-town feel and proximity to an urban center.

Kristin says she's looking forward to leading AFE. "The main purpose of Advocates is to educate parents as to how they can best represent their children's interests in the school district. We want to make it possible for parents to make informed decisions about the future of education in Whitefish Bay. All members of AFE may not agree on the best course of action, but we can at least provide opportunities for a healthy debate."

Kristin's hopes for her kids? "In a world where superlatives seem to be the norm, I really just hope that they feel happy, healthy and fulfilled. If they do great things, I will be thrilled. But I will be equally proud if they are simply great people."

SCHOOL BUILDINGS, REINVESTMENT

A committee of Whitefish Bay parents, community members, teachers and administrators is gathering information to make recommendations on capital improvements for village schools over the next 15 years. The group is reviewing the possible updating or expansion of school facilities to accommodate academic, athletic and recreational programs.

The timing of the effort is prompted by the expected retirement of long-term school district debt in the next few years. In the mid-1990s, the

former Henry Clay School was remodeled to become the current Whitefish Bay Middle School. Retirement of the district's long-term debt and related property tax levy offers an opportunity to examine the need for facilities upgrades. School property tax levies for long-term debt must be used for capital improvements, not operations. Because of the statewide education spending cap, use of long-term debt is the only way to finance capital improvements.

Whitefish Bay school buildings

were constructed between the 1920s and 1950s, and many are in need of repair or remodel. So far, committee members have identified updated plumbing, pools or performance facilities as possible uses for the money; others may favor a modest tax break. The committee has hired an architect to provide estimates of various options and their benefits.

The facilities committee will report back to taxpayers and the school board with its recommendations by the start of next year.

HATS OFF TO LONGTIME AFE BOARD MEMBERS

Barbara Penner Beckert and Jim Schacht are stepping down from the Advocates for Education board this spring after many years of service.

Jim Schacht, an IRS attorney in Milwaukee, began as AFE secretary, worked as vice president of programs, then served four years as president. Board members working with Jim admire his optimism, clarity of thought and willingness to work long hours organizing for AFE.

"I always appreciated how Jim just rolled with the punches, encouraging people and always bringing out the best in everyone he worked with," said AFE emeritus board member Connie Gavin.

Jim says he dedicated so much time to AFE because the organization fills an important niche.

"I think most people in Whitefish Bay place a high value on our schools, but we need an organization such as AFE to monitor the education landscape, keep people informed and encourage action when the time is right," Jim said.

Jim Schacht and his wife, Nancy, have four children. Steve, Jonno and Kelley are in college; Betsy is a senior at Whitefish Bay High School.

Barbara Beckert's day jobs are assistant director - Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations, and director of the Jewish Community Mental Health Education Project for Jewish Family Services. Like Jim, she's volunteered for AFE in a number of roles, including vice president of programs and vice president of advocacy. Said longtime board member Meredie Scrivner, "Barbara Beckert is one of the most thoughtful, compassionate and passionate people I have ever known. She always has her facts right, and she always is willing to look at an issue from all sides, even when she has strong views. She is highly respected in Madison and in Milwaukee for her fairness, her ethics and her

generous spirit."

Barbara and her husband, Ed, have two sons. Max is a sophomore in college; Jake is a freshman at Whitefish Bay High School. Barbara says a local parent group focused on advocacy is essential.

"High quality public schools were one of the primary reasons we chose to live in Whitefish Bay. However, we have seen from the middle school referendum failure here (in the mid-1990s) and experiences elsewhere in the state that we cannot be complacent or take for granted that this will continue." She adds, "I am heartened to see the wonderful young parents providing new leadership on the AFE board. We need active involvement from more young families to improve on our tradition, and do what's best for kids."

AFE members send good wishes and thanks to Barbara and Jim, pledging to honor their contributions with energetic and thoughtful advocacy for Whitefish Bay Schools.

Proposed 2007-2008 AFE Board

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