



HELPING HANDS...Evergreen Elementary students Jamie Bush and Grace O'Brien are "Helping Hands." Fourth graders volunteer for one month at a time to help out either at morning drop off or afternoon pickup. Some of their responsibilities include holding the doors open, answering questions and guiding students to where they need to be.

THE STUDENT VIEW

The weekly column written by local high school students

Governor's School Can Develop Students' Interests

By ELENA TINFOW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Around the junior year is the time most high school students start seriously considering college. Where do they want to go? How much are they or their parents willing to pay? How will they get there?

One important factor to consider when looking at colleges is: how do students spend their summers? Students are able to get a summer job, go to a camp or pre-college program, or work on summer assignments.

Some students would rather do nothing and simply relax and enjoy the time away from school. However, some summer programs can help students decide where they want to go to college or what they want to study.

Specific programs can offer areas of study to develop student's interests. A very good program to get involved with is the Governor's School of New Jersey.

Governor Tom Kean chartered the first Governor's School for Public Issues in 1983. Since then, five more Governor's Schools have been created and about 7,000 students have participated.

Currently, there are six Governor's Schools: Arts at The College of New Jersey, Engineering and Technology at Rutgers, Environment at the Richard Stockton College, International Studies at Ramapo College, Public Issues at Monmouth University and Sciences

at Drew University. The preliminary application date for the 2007 summer program has already passed, however the secondary application process has begun. For the School of the Arts, some categories require a preliminary live audition, and others require a secondary live audition. Only if the applicant excels in both the preliminary and secondary auditions can she or he be accepted.

Any high school junior living in New Jersey may apply, but the program is highly selective. About 2,400 applications are received each year; however, about 625 students participate. If a student is accepted, he or she receives full scholarship tuition, no matter what school it is. Each school has a four-week program, though each school runs at a different time during the summer.

I am applying to Governor's School because I think it is a wonderful opportunity to further my interests. Hopefully, just by applying to this program, I can see if I truly am devoted to a subject. Even if I don't make it in, I can learn about my interests. If I do make it in, I will have the chance to study with professionals and great teachers in the area; this could greatly aid me in choosing studies for college.

The above information and more can be found at govschool.org.

Elena Tinfow is a junior at Union County Magnet School.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Common Sense and School Financial Reform

The effort to enact property tax reforms in this state has come to a standstill. One party is effectively and no doubt gratefully out of the decision making loop while the other meets in private session trying to hold together a majority for any kind of reform, misguided or not.

In fairness to the legislators in Trenton, school financial reform is impossible because the public wants contradictory things. We value local control and high quality schools, so each year we come to the polls in April and raise the amount of property taxes we must pay. In fact, school property taxes are the only taxes that require direct approval of the voters.

If you attend a school budget hearing, at least in most suburbs, people may complain about property taxes but they are passionate about providing maximum educational opportunity for their children.

Superintendents and board members are no more heroic than legislators when faced with parents asking for smaller class sizes, more co-curricular activities and expanded guidance. Indeed it is rare that we are confronted with a request that will not benefit students, despite the additional cost.

The larger community accepts these budget increases because the value of their house is a function of the quality of the schools. Real estate agents tell prospective buyers the neighborhood school has great test scores, low class sizes and the community is pro-education.

The governor and the legislature need to take a step back for a moment and reframe the problem they are trying to solve. Voters want to lower property taxes, not school quality. They want more state support not less local control. There is opportunity for real reform even among these conflicting agenda, but the governor must recognize that solving difficult problems is less about right answers than helping the citizens of this state face the contradictions of their aspirations.

The governor needs to go on the road and confront the issue of school finance reform both as an educator and a listener. His road trip should include traditional town meetings as well as electronic ones.

Most of us have little understanding of the financial condition of this state. He needs to become the teacher, explaining the state's deficit, his concerns about equity and how taxation works.

He needs to listen, not to the usual

suspects in Trenton, but to the grassroots of voters around the state. I have had the opportunity of witnessing the grassroots effort of our own town when proposed school legislation that had no benefit of previous public input was grounded to at least a temporary halt on December 14.

Of course the governor cannot ignore the power brokers in Trenton, but he can serve as their teacher and listener or the system will collapse in an atmosphere of political paralysis.

The governor needs to talk with superintendents of schools, who must implement any reforms handed down from Trenton. We don't understand the financial problems he is facing, but we know what it's like to sit through an angry meeting as we try to balance parent aspirations and taxpayer concerns.

I, for one, would welcome an external financial audit from an inspector general's office that could provide clear direction on how to reduce costs. That same process could compliment local administrators who do run efficient school districts and strengthen voter confidence.

Finally, the governor needs to talk with boards of education about the benefits and pitfalls of consolidation. Most plans to consolidate fail for two reasons: fear of losing local control and differences in property tax wealth.

The Chatham's successfully merged because parents in both communities were convinced that their children would receive a better education in a newly merged district. The idea of establishing a commission to offer suggestions for consolidation is a good one, especially if the state can address the differences in property wealth supporting a newly consolidated district.

The pundits have already announced the death of property tax reform in New Jersey. While I think this obituary is premature, the current closed legislative caucuses followed by rumors and poorly constructed bills will hasten the death of substantive changes.

As the leader of this state, the governor must confront us with the contradictions in our aspirations for lower property taxes and more spending. He must educate us about the state's financial condition while creating a process that engages us in finding solutions.

William J. Foley
Superintendent of Schools



READY FOR REHEARSALS...Westfield's Washington Elementary School Principal Andrew Perry and PTO Presidents Marie Morris and Pat Seery review final script changes for the 59th Annual Washington School Show, *Stick to the Status Quo*. The Washington School community is working on this year's performance - written, directed and performed by parents, teachers and staff of the school - to be held January 26 and 27, 2007 at Roosevelt Intermediate School in Westfield.



PRIDE...Westfield's McKinley Elementary School celebrated the Thanksgiving season with an event hosted by special education teacher Susan Glick. All special education faculty, from across the district, as well as all the families of Mrs. Glick's students, were invited to attend the traditional feast and performance. Pictured is the transitional kindergarten class singing "Proud to Be an American."



STEPPING BACK IN TIME...During a class trip to Williamsburg, Va., Billy Buchbinder of Scotch Plains, a seventh grader at The Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Scotch Plains, joined a classmate in wearing Colonial outfits for a special fashion show. Billy also learned about how to work on a tobacco plantation, Colonial etiquette practices, tailoring duties and how to play the Colonial game of Trap Ball.

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School Bond Video To Be Shown On TV36

WESTFIELD - A 12-minute video explaining the rationale behind the Westfield school bond proposal will be shown on Blue Devils TV-36 from Saturday, December 23, to Tuesday, January 23. It will be broadcast: Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:30, 5:30 and 7 p.m., Saturdays at 3:30 and 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2:45 and 5 p.m.

The video, which is available on DVD, can be borrowed for overnight view from the main offices in the Westfield Public Schools, the Community Relations Office at 302 Elm Street, or the Westfield Memorial Library. Limited copies are available, so please call first to confirm availability.

Produced and edited by Westfield High School TV, several students participated in the creation of the video, including seniors Seth Applebaum, who edited the entire film, and Alex Forstenhausler, who served as narrator.

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The holiday season means so much to us all. From the anticipation of visiting our families to the thrill of witnessing a child's excitement and glee upon opening a gift from Santa-it all is so very special. No matter what part of the holidays is your favorite, we would all agree that this time of the year is magical because we share it with our loved ones. So when you look for the perfect gift for your family and friends, do not overlook the gift of good health. Deciding to take care of your health or encouraging a friend or loved one to do so is a gift that keeps on giving long after the holiday season is gone!

Happy Holidays from our family to yours!



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