

THE DALLAS POST

EDITORIALS

Quality education isn't primarily an economic issue

The directors of the Dallas School District will meet later this week to finalize the district's budget for the 1991-92 school year. At issue will be whether to adopt the tentative budget that includes a 15 mill property tax increase, or to spend less or more than that budget allows.

Objections have been raised against the proposed budget as some residents protest that it raises taxes too much and others believe that more spending is needed to maintain quality education. The district's teachers have been among the most vocal groups supporting the latter, claiming that at least a 22 mill tax hike is needed to avoid the layoff of needed teachers and curtailment of important programs.

Whatever position you support, some facts are unassailable; that state and federal contributions to education are not growing as fast as they have in the past, that over-reliance on property taxes brings hardship to some who can least afford it, and that quality education is important to our society's growth and prosperity. What is not clear is the relationship between the size of school budgets and the quality of education.

Much has been written of late about the superior test scores racked up by students in Catholic schools and other private institutions. An article in the Wall Street Journal focused on the Diocese of Scranton in asserting that parochial school students were receiving a better education than public schools offered, and at substantially less cost.

Certainly private school teachers would be surprised to hear that bigger budgets mean better education, since their compensation is about half that paid to their counterparts in the public schools. The starting annual salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree in the Dallas School District is now \$20,715. The average salary is \$41,775 (average length of service is 21 years). Add to that the value of summers off and benefits most people can only dream of (including payment for the college courses that lead to a higher salary) and you have a package that far exceeds what most private sector workers will ever receive.

The point isn't that public school teachers are overpaid—the good ones certainly aren't given the responsibility they bear. But they aren't all good; as in any human endeavor, there is a wide range of competence and effectiveness between the worst and the best. There's the crux of the matter and one that money won't solve. If bigger budgets and higher salaries guaranteed superior performance, it wouldn't be hard to justify high taxes. But just the opposite may be true; attention focused on budgets and salaries has distracted everyone in the public school systems so much that their true function—teaching children to be productive citizens—has been displaced by self-centered concerns.

It's time to face up to the facts; our public educational systems have become bogged down in bureaucratic squabbling and their mission to provide a proper education for all children has been compromised as teachers and administrators argue over superficial budget items. No wonder teachers are said to be unhappy; instead of gaining satisfaction from helping young men and women on their journey to adulthood, they're focused on whether or not they got as large a raise as their counterparts across the state. Meanwhile, administrations are unable or unwilling to enforce standards on teachers or students.

"Back to basics" has become a rallying cry among education reformers, but they're missing the point. What schools need most today isn't a change in what is taught, but in the attitudes of administrators, teachers and students. Bring back the basics, yes, but make them basics of behavior and discipline, purpose and pride. Start by demanding that students treat their time in school as more important than anything else they do. Institute dress codes so they don't miss the message that school is not like home or a friend's house. Reward teachers who are able to generate a hunger for knowledge among their students and invite those who fall short of acceptable standards to seek work elsewhere. Highlight academic achievement above athletics. It all boils down to changing the value system at work in our schools.

More taxes or less will not turn public education around; higher standards and new values will. That change must begin at home with parents who inculcate an appreciation for learning, and who refuse to accept mediocre performance in the classroom from either their children or educators. Education isn't primarily an economic issue, but failure to achieve academic skill will deal the greatest blow to our society and the individuals within it.

DALLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET MEETINGS

June 28—8 PM, Middle School Auditorium, work session open to the public.
June 29—7 PM, Adoption of final budget, Administration bldg., Church St.



Horses near Machell Avenue, Dallas

(Photo by Charlotte Bartizek)

Letters

Asks that Dallas music program be maintained

Editor's Note: The author of this letter asked that The Post print it so that his thoughts would reach the entire community.

Board of Education
Dallas Area School District
Dallas, Pennsylvania 18612

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing to formally protest the news that the secondary choral music program at Dallas is being discontinued.

As a member of the Class of 1974, some of my most valuable lessons were learned under the direction of Mrs. Florence Sherwood, director of this program. As I understand, Mrs. Sherwood is leaving on sabbatical, which in itself is a great loss, however there are many qualified and gifted music educators, some of which are Dallas graduates, who will be willing to try to fill her shoes!

As an active member of the choral program at Dallas, I was exposed to discipline, hard work and many personal experiences that one can never learn in the regular classroom, such as visiting nursing homes, hospitals and Veterans Homes. It was through

this music program that I learned about what would be the most valuable two years of my life, traveling with the international cast of "Up With People!", for my senior year of high school and first year of college.

There is also the valuable lessons that were learned as students throughout the years attended district, regional, state and nationwide choral events representing Dallas. What a remarkable experience that was!

Many Dallas music students went on to further their careers in music, in such fields as music education and music therapy, as well as celebrated professional musicians, such as my friend, Dr. William Cutter of Boston. Also, many people that I work with at local community theaters, are graduates of Dallas, and to this day can still feel the impact this program had on their lives.

I realize economically that times are difficult, however, should not a compromise be made? Has the funding for Athletic Programs been affected? Emphasis on sports has always out-weighted the importance of fine arts, not only at Dallas, but many other area schools. Although

I am not suggesting cutting sports programs either, I am asking you to take a look into programs which benefit those whose talents do not excel on the football field or basketball court, and give those students a chance at quality, creative education.

Stephen F. Hartman
Kingston

Says 'thanks' for the coverage

Editor:
We at the Idetown United Methodist Church Couples Club wish to thank you and the Dallas Post for the wonderful pre-auction coverage.

The photograph and the write-up were tops. It helped to make our auction the best ever.

Henry Bergstrasser

Send The Post to a friend,
it makes a great gift.
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Living Will law moves ahead in Pennsylvania Senate

Pennsylvania moved a step closer to passing a living will law, as the Senate approved a bill allowing residents to choose, in advance, what type of life-sustaining treatment they would accept in cases of serious illness, according to Sen. Charles D. Lemmond (R-20).

Sen. Lemmond, who voted in favor of the bill, said passage of living will legislation is long overdue and would help to address many of the difficult legal and ethical questions surrounding the right to die. He said work on the legislation has been underway for more than a decade, but has been slowed by differing viewpoints on how such a law should be drafted.

"I commend all the groups who worked together to get this bill through the Senate," Sen. Lemmond said. "It's an issue that is important to everyone who is concerned about ensuring that everyone has the right to death

with dignity."

Currently, the Commonwealth is one of only three states that does not give legal standing to "living wills," which allow people to determine what kind of heroic measures they are willing to accept in cases of an advanced terminal illness or irreversible coma.

Sen. Lemmond said Senate Bill 3 meets the test of the Supreme Court ruling in the Cruzan case, which specified that patients must give "clear and convincing evidence" to allow doctors or family members to take a patient off life support. It would apply only to people who have executed living wills.

The document would have to be witnessed by two people and provided to the patient's doctor. The bill includes a sample declaration that would allow patients to check a box to the forms of life support they do not want to be used.

Only yesterday

60 Years Ago - July 3, 1931
BUS SERVICE SLATED AT HARVEYS LAKE

The Hemlock tree has been declared the official state tree by the State General Assembly.

Effective Monday new bus service will begin around Harveys Lake. Dallas junior baseball team of the American Legion lost its chances to participate in the state contests by two runs, losing to Forty Fort 2-1 and to Pringle 13-12.

The Secret Six, starring Wallace Beery, played Friday and Saturday at the Himmler Theatre.

50 Years Ago - July 3, 1941
UNION STARTED AT NOXEN TANNERY

Thirty three new names were added Tuesday to the Dallas draft rolls.

The U.S. Army invited Mr. and Mrs. David Brace of Dallas to Gettysburg to watch the maneuvers in a mock air raid by the 71st Regiment of which their son Samuel is a member.

Tannery workers organized a union at the Noxen plant. Fireworks and boat parade highlight July 4 at Harveys Lake.

Engaged - Cathlyn Parkinson and George Lewis.

Wed - Claudia Jones and N.F. Montross; Helen Anthony and William Carr; Mary Alice Johnston and William Kishbaugh, Jr.

40 Years Ago - June 29, 1951
LAKE LIONS CLUB GIVES FIRE EQUIPMENT

The Barn teems with activity as goods are delivered but more used goods are needed for the Library Auction.

Harveys Lake Lions Club buys a resuscitator to be housed at the Daniel C. Roberts Fire Company building.

Engaged - Bernadine Michael and George Remetz; Elizabeth Decker and George McCue.

Wed - Mary Ruth Robinson and Howard Stillwell; Lenore E. Pascoe and William Dymond.

Jackson Little League is in first place in the league with a 6-2 record with Dallas close on Jackson's heels with a 5-2 record.

30 Years Ago - June 29, 1961
ALEXANDER NAMED ROTARY PRESIDENT

Everybody in the area was led Friday and Saturday at Charlie Gosart's 2-day open house.

Dallas School District will establish a summer recreation program for children over six in the Dallas area.

James Alexander to be installed as president of Dallas Rotary.

Residents hear report on Dallas School changes to be made this summer to relieve pressure on other schools in the district.

Daddow Isaacs team defeats Duke Isaac team 9-6 in Back Mountain Baseball for Boys.

Engaged - Arline Misson and John Anzalone.

Wed - Barbar Ann Cooney and Larry William Farr; Ruth Marie Waldow and Joseph D. Stachnik; Marian Theresa Elenchik and John Edward Kern.

20 Years Ago - July 1, 1971
NO MILLAGE INCREASE IN SCHOOL BUDGETS

The 1971-72 budget of the Dallas School District was approved with no tax increase foreseen.

Residents of Shavertown complain about bad taste of the water.

No millage rise seen for Lake-Lehman budget.

Magistrate Frederick Anderson is elected a state director.

East Dallas continues to lead Teeners League.

Wed - Pattie Larson and Gregory L. Hicks; Linda Hagenbaugh and Kurt D. Schneider; Myra Berti and Frederick James Gosart; Susan Carol Oppenheim and A. John Dimond.

Engaged - Susan Ellen Sipple and Matthew P. Gillis, III.

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THE DALLAS POST

Published Weekly by Bartsen Media, Inc.
P.O. Box 366, Dallas PA 18612
Telephone: 717-675-5211

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AND THE PENNSYLVANIA NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION