

OUR OPINION

School attendance shouldn't come at too high a cost

For all its faults — and there are many — the federal No Child Left Behind act has forced school administrators to look with new intensity at policies and procedures that can affect student performance. While the federal government has specified standards for test scores, teacher qualifications and graduation rates, each state can pick from a basket of other benchmarks and Pennsylvania chose attendance. That seems like a wise decision, at least if you believe the old saying that half of success derives just from showing up.

The NCLB standard for attendance is 95 percent. That may sound high, but when applied to an individual student leaves room for nine absences in a 180-day school year, not an unreasonable number for someone with a strong constitution and a reasonable family life. But not all students live in such circumstances, so to reach the 95 percent threshold, schools must work conscientiously to reduce chronic absenteeism, since failing to hit the mark or show improvement can lead to a failing school label. That designation triggers consequences that include having to provide transportation to a supposedly better school in another district.

The Dallas and Lake-Lehman school districts are both hovering around the acceptable level, but not without a great deal of effort. Each district has its own approach, and Dallas has the advantage of a full-time Home and School Visitor, who spends a portion of his time working with truant students and their families. But try as they might, both districts don't get through to a certain number of families each year, and send them to the magistrate when all other approaches have failed. It's our guess that even that drastic action doesn't always get unwilling students back in class.

So, what are we do do? Should schools — in order to meet some theoretical standard — direct even more resources to students who don't value a traditional education or clearly don't want to be in school? Under the NCLB system, our schools have little choice, or they'll be faced with even more disruption if placed on the bad list. This seems like a misuse of administrators' talent and energy that could be better used on students who demonstrate some interest in their own improvement. Perhaps a better solution is to offer classes and activities that will attract reluctant students to school, even if those offerings don't fit the standard curriculum. Then, legal action could be reserved for only the most egregious cases.

The worst option is to commit even more teacher and administration time to chasing down students and families who show no interest in school, diverting resources from those who recognize the benefits of a good education. But as long as NCLB exists, that may be the only real choice.

Student achievements tell a positive story

And now the good news from the schools — lots of it. Each week, The Post receives or reports on student achievements from the mundane to the meritorious, and it's remarkable how many there are. From dean's lists to diving medals, business clubs to science fairs, local students demonstrate a remarkable range of accomplishments, and we are more than happy to report them.

This week's issue carries stories about two large groups of achievers — the Future Business Leaders of Dallas and science students from both the Dallas and Lake-Lehman districts — and a host of others. The business group is sending its largest contingent ever to state competition — 15 students — and there is hope that some of them will earn a spot at the national event, as Steve Losh did last year. In science, several teams from both schools qualified for the state level Science Olympiad by placing well in a regional competition held at Penn State Wilkes-Barre.

The sports pages are loaded with names of individual and team champions at all levels. While skill at basketball or swimming is unlikely to bring lifelong benefits, it's always interesting to note how many young people excel both on the field and in the classroom, setting a pattern for a lifetime of achievement.

So, keep those items coming. We may not be able to get them in as quickly as you'd like, since often there are too many to fit in a single issue, but we're honored that you trust us to spread the word about these worthwhile deeds, which foretell a bright future for your children and our region.

Letters are welcome

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear and verifiable threat to the writer.
- No writer may have more than one letter addressing the same topic published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

Send letters to: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre PA 18711, or by e-mail to: thepost@leader.net.

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Field in Noxen looks for signs of spring. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

GUEST COLUMN

Land trust says thanks to property owners

By RICK KOVAL

The North Branch Land Trust is proud to have completed four wonderful land conservation projects during 2003 — three in the month of December alone. Totalling 617 acres on four properties, these projects bring the total number of acres preserved by NBLT to more than 1,000 acres, thanks to the dedication of 11 property owners. You may view and download pictures of the properties preserved in 2003 at www.nblt.org/2003inreview/.

NBLT would like to extend special thanks to the following landowners that helped us reach this goal in 2003.

— Julianne and Howard Daly with 243 acres in Lake Township, Luzerne County.

— Gerard Kipp with 42 acres in Sweet Valley, Luzerne County.

— J. Harvey with 52 acres near Lopez, Sullivan County.

— Bill Dittmar and Frederick Kulikowski with 280 acres in Silver Lake Township, Susquehanna County.

These properties all have unique conservation values — from mixed mature hardwood trees to unique plant and animal habitats, watersheds, or scenic viewsheds that help make our communities special. Specifically, on the Kipp property, the plant and animal inventories conducted on the property revealed an impressive and diverse listing of species. Landowner Gerard Kipp of Rhode Island was overwhelmed by the number of species listed in his baseline inventory report. (And that's only reflective of a limited number of mid-to-late season flora and fauna visits.) In addition, according to Mr. Kipp,

"the signing of this easement is obviously one of the more important events of my life."

Aside from the environmental benefits of conservation, the landowners may qualify for substantial income tax savings based on the value of the development rights donated to NBLT. Finally, preserving open spaces helps keep Pennsylvania beautiful — an important consideration since tourism is one of the state's largest industries.

"Preserving Precious Land Forever" is why the North Branch Land Trust was created. This means working with property owners to permanently conserve their land using a tool called a conservation easement (more info at <http://www.NBLT.org>). A conservation easement allows a property owner to retain ownership and possession of the property, while donating select-

ed development rights to NBLT — meaning the farm, wetland, mountain or other property will never be the site of inappropriate development. In addition, NBLT helps to save historic structures (like the Noxen Train Depot), and we recognize and try to address land-use issues such as urban decay, suburban sprawl, loss of open space, and sustainable land-use planning while preserving the community's culture.

The North Branch Land Trust — formed a decade ago to help protect the quality of life in this region. For more information on this event or the NBLT in general, please call Rick Koval at 696 1691 or e-mail rick.koval@nblt.org.

Rick Koval is the Land Protection Specialist for the North Branch Land Trust.

GUEST COLUMN

Land trust says thanks to property owners

Editor,

Your editorial about state grants and Harveys Lake was irresponsible and biased as well as grossly unfair to the people of Harveys Lake!

First let me say that the people of Harveys Lake pay their fair share of state taxes — income, sales, gasoline, etc. — and are certainly deserving of their fair share of state grant monies.

Secondly, I want to point out that millions and millions of state grant monies are awarded across our state each year for all kinds of projects. Grant money doesn't just fall into your lap. The amount for

which the community qualifies and what programs for which it qualifies are largely based on population. Small communities must compete to get their fair share. I don't gain anything because a library across the state gets a state grant; or some Growing Greener Grant is awarded to preserve some wetlands in the northern counties; or to build a new bridge somewhere else in the state. Therefore, why should you expect the people of Harveys Lake to provide something to benefit the entire state with their state grant monies? That is ridiculous!

As far as I am concerned, the

people of Harveys Lake are doing more than their fair share to preserve this natural resource by way of a \$600 a year sewer bill. The sewer system was state mandated and requires 14 pumping stations to pump around this big lake. Our small population must share in this cost. More than half our population does not own shoreline. I will agree that even so, their property values are higher because of the quality of our lake water. I think the state should do more to help our community keep the lake clean. After all, it is the largest natural lake in the state and does have a nice, free state access

area complete with toilet facilities, used by people from all over the state. The last I knew, this lake is also listed as an emergency water supply.

It would be in the best interest of the state to help out here more. I read your opinion, this is mine.

Micell'e T. Boice
Harveys Lake

Editor's Note: Perhaps the editorial wasn't clear. It was not our intent to dismiss the efforts being made to improve the water quality at Harveys Lake, only to point out that few people share in the benefits, since public access is limited to a boat launch.

70 Years Ago
March 16, 1934

WATER SHORTAGE ENDS AS WEATHER WARMS

— Slowly rising temperatures this week thawed many of the water mains which have been frozen for several weeks.

ONLY YESTERDAY

— The Dallas Rotary will conduct its annual Easter Egg hunt for children at Fernbrook Park on Saturday, March 31.

— The debating team from Misericordia defeated the team from Pittston Council, Knights of Columbus, in the college gymnasium last Friday.

60 Years Ago
March 17, 1944

LABARS BOMBARDED WITH MAIL

— The Timothy LaBars of

Main Street, were literally bombarded with letters from all sections of the country, calling to their attention the article written by Ernie Pyle about their son, Jimmy.

— Claude Newhart, junior at Lehman High School, took tests this week for the Army Aviation Cadet Reserves.

— Items that could be purchased at the ACME Super Market: Pork Loins, 37¢ per pound; iceberg lettuce or new carrots, 2 for 15¢.

50 Years Ago
March 19, 1954

TRIPLETS FOR HADSALLS

— The tiny triplets born last week to Mr. and Mrs. Carlton B. Hadsall are holding their own at Nesbitt Hospital. The three had a combined birth weight of 11 pounds.

— Back Mountain Horsemen's Club has made plans for a 100-mile ride in April.

— The Women's Missionary Society of Trucksville Free Methodist Church is searching for a used treadle-operated Singer Sewing Machine to

send to Pearl James in the Dominican Republic.

40 Years Ago
March 19, 1964

CRANE RAISES CROSS

— A steel cross covered with aluminum, weighing about 1,000 pounds is raised by a crane to the top of the new chapel at College Misericordia.

— One of Noxen's most beloved citizens, Lawrence Race, 77, passed away at his home Monday morning, following a long illness.

30 Years Ago
March 21, 1974

SWINGLES TO OBSERVE 70TH ANNIVERSARY

— Mr. and Mrs. Ellis Swingle, Sterling Farms, Harveys Lake, will observe their 70th wedding anniversary, March 24. The couple was married in 1904 by the late Rev. Stang.

— Three-hundred guests attended a Saint Patrick's Day

dance held in the Gate of Heaven auditorium.

— Items that could be purchased at the A & P Market: whole beef loin, \$1.38; family pack pork loin, 88¢ per pound; Chase and Sanborn coffee, 99¢ per pound.

20 Years Ago
March 21, 1984

LIBRARY PLANS MOVE

— The library should move to its new quarters in the old Dallas Borough School by Jan. 1985. Architects estimate it will require about \$300,000 to revamp the building.

— A creek improvement project from the Main Street bridge in Shavertown to about 1,000 feet north is set to begin soon.

— Aspect Associates decision to withdraw its application to build 38 townhomes on the corner of North Lehigh Street in Shavertown has residents of the area elated.

Only Yesterday is compiled from the back-issue files of The Post.