

## OUR OPINION

## A disturbing pattern for the Dallas School Board

There are troubling signs in recent proceedings of the Dallas School Board, actions that do not reflect well on the community that supports and takes pride in a school system considered one of the best in the region.

Things started badly last fall, when the resignation of board member Anthony Barbose was announced the day before an election for five of the nine board seats. Barbose's position was not on that ballot, so the board had 30 days to appoint a replacement, or hand over that responsibility to a Luzerne County judge. The logical choice was Dennis Gochoel, who had out-voted three incumbents in the May, 2003 primary, and whose vote total fell just short in the general election.

It's unclear what maneuverings went on in the background, but the sitting board dawdled past the appointment deadline. In the end, the court properly awarded the seat to Gochoel on December 18.

In the middle of this near debacle, the board chose to ignore rather than address allegations that football coach Ted Jackson had tangled with a player during halftime of the Old Shoe Game. In remaining silent, district officials did a disservice to both the coach and player involved, leaving rumors to swirl and lawsuits to be threatened.

Then, last month, the board, on 5-4 votes, hired 11 sports coaches in one vote, beating back two attempts to separate the reappointment of the controversial Jackson; passed over a middle school math/technology teacher recommended by the administration; and rejected a plan on how to cover for Assistant Superintendent Michael Speziale, who is taking a one-year leave of absence.

The latest episode, appointment of a replacement for board member Deborah Morgantini, who resigned effective June 4, was perhaps the most disquieting. Not only was the vote shifted to the end of the June 14 agenda, the meeting appeared to be intentionally prolonged as the board took up individually a long list of personnel issues rather than vote on them as one, exactly the opposite of how coaching appointments were handled a month earlier. That is a common stalling tactic public officials use when they want to take action on controversial issues before the smallest possible audience.

The choice itself, and how it was made, raise other disturbing questions. In what seemed to be a prearranged 5-2 vote, the board appointed Dan Nulton, the chief executive of Landmark Bank, where the district had deposited several million dollars in February. There are at least two serious faults in the appointment, neither of which have anything to do with Nulton's character or qualifications:

1. If the comments of board members are to be believed, no candidate, including Nulton, was interviewed by the board. At least six people expressed interest in the post, including two former board members.

2. As an officer of a bank holding district assets, Nulton cannot properly participate in some important discussions and votes. The district ostensibly opened accounts with Landmark to take advantage of higher interest rates. What if another bank offers a better deal? School districts have many financial relationships, and while Nulton's expertise may be valuable, there are potential conflicts. It would be better for everyone to have seen that Nulton's assets more than offset this liability.

Perhaps the board would have chosen Nulton even after conducting thorough interviews, possibly by an even wider margin. Certainly, all board members — and the public — deserved to review and discuss all the candidates, their qualifications and their vision for the Dallas schools.

This appointment continues a pattern that has gone on far too long in the Dallas School District. Whether it has been construction projects, personnel moves or curriculum changes, both the board and administration have consistently failed to fully inform and involve parents and taxpayers when important decisions have been made.

This new board majority must understand that if they desire to guide Dallas schools for more than one term, they must do better — not worse — at communicating with and listening to the people who provide the generous resources that are available to the Dallas schools.

## Letters, columns and editorials

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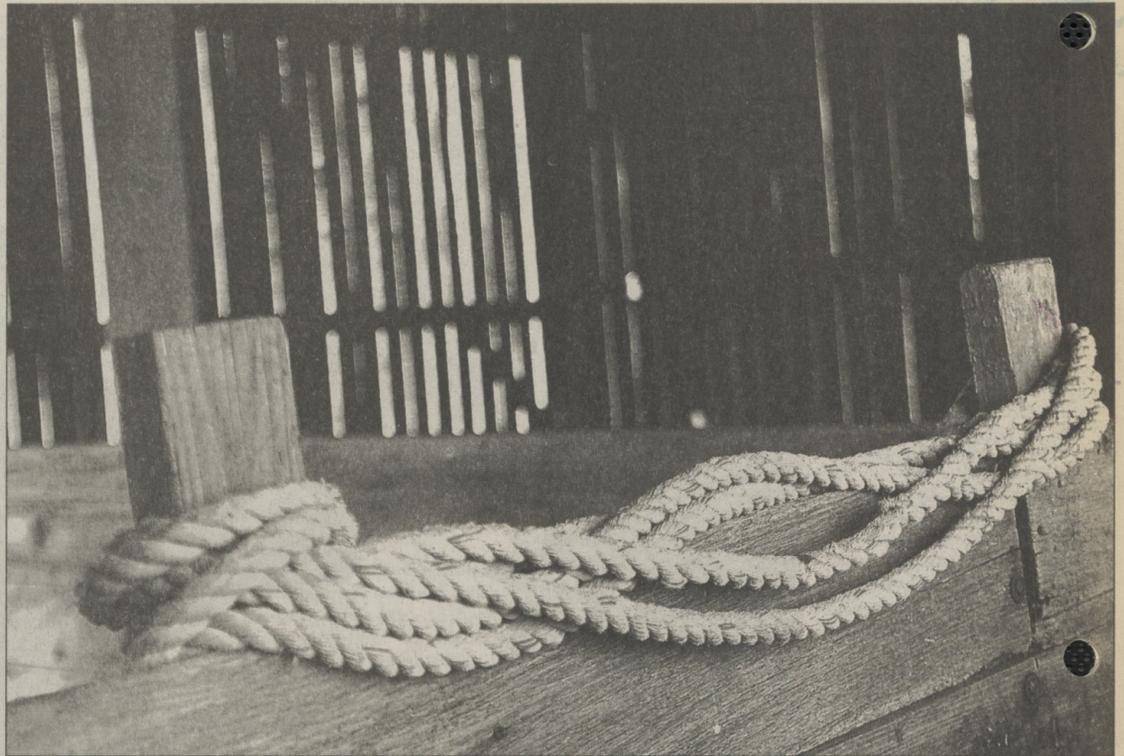
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Contrast in curve and line. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

## LETTERS

## School board not making right moves to build trust

Editor,

My children have attended schools in the Dallas School District for the past 14 years. During that time, I have held various offices in the elementary PTOs, been a member of the middle school Parent Support Group, the high school Parent Teacher Student Organization, and sat for a term on the Parents' Advisory Council. I have written newsletters for both the middle and high schools for many years, gone to dozens of Parent/Teacher conferences, and have attended quite a few school board meetings.

I have to say that although I have not always agreed with certain policies or decisions, nor have all of my requests granted, I have never felt the way I did at the conclusion of the school board meeting on June 14.

I initially went to the meeting to express my support for the renewal of Dr. Gil Griffiths' contract as superintendent. My children have done very well in their academic endeavors in this district. As a product of in-

tensified scheduling at the high school, my son was able to take eight science courses, eight mathematics courses, two college courses and scored high enough to validate three AP courses at one of the most demanding colleges in the country.

As a correspondent for a local newspaper, I have written stories about this district's academic achievements from History Day, JETS, and Life Smarts to Student of the Quarter, Science Olympiad and NASA connections. As a member of the community, I have watched with great pride as the reputation for excellence in education in this district has grown over the last several years. I worry that the current actions of the board can change all of that.

The most recent board meeting was held in the middle school auditorium to accommodate the expected crowd, and there were a great number of parents, students, teachers, and other taxpayers in attendance. On several occasions, board president David Usavage

expressed appreciation that so many people attended, especially in light of all of the rumors that are circulating. Public meetings are a great way to get information out and to quell rumors.

However, Mr. Usavage removed item number 5 from the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. This item pertained to the appointment to replace Deborah Morgantini in her unexpired term on the board. Throughout the rest of the very lengthy meeting, Mr. Usavage requested a roll-call vote on all but a few motions, even though the vast majority of those motions had unanimous approval. After 10 p.m., with only a handful of people remaining, under the New Business section of the meeting, Usavage nominated Dan Nulton to the vacant position.

I do not know Mr. Nulton and will not debate his ability to make the right decisions for my children who attend Dallas public schools. Rather, I would like Mr. Usavage to explain why he felt it was not appropriate to make his nomination of

Dan Nulton to the Dallas School Board when he had such a large audience in attendance.

Trust goes a long way in dispelling rumors and trust can only come when the actions of public officials warrant it.

Four school board members, Frank Natitus, Bruce Goring, Russell Bigus and Gary Mathers, voted in favor of the appointment although none of them said they knew Mr. Nulton and none of them had interviewed him. Five other people submitted letters of interest in this position, two of whom were formerly elected to the board by voters.

Rather than being comforted by Mr. Usavage's assertion that Dr. Griffiths' contract renewal has not been discussed yet, with one more "friend of Usavage" officially on the board, I am more inclined than ever to believe in rumors. If you feel as I do, please get in touch with our school board members and let them know.

Mary Barbara Gilligan  
Dallas

June 22, 1934  
70 Years Ago

## RELAY SWIMMING TEAMS TO ENTER 8-DAY GRIND AT LAKE

A swim-a-thon, in which relay teams will compete 24 hours a day for eight days will start at Harveys Lake on June 30.

Among the entries are Irving Roe, Lewis Lotko and



## ONLY YESTERDAY

Oliver Herbert.

A meeting of the Democratic committees will be held in the West Wyoming High School Friday night at 8 p.m. Among those invited are C.W. Kunkle, Martin Belbow, J. Culver and N.A. Staub.

Mrs. W.L. Tracy of Shavertown left Wednesday for Hollywood, Calif., where she will be the guest of her son, Lee Tracy, motion picture star, for the summer months.

60 Years Ago  
June 23, 1944

## FIFTEEN MEN ARE CALLED UP

Draft Board No. 1 at Wyoming has called eight men for induction into the Navy on June 27 and seven men for induction into the Army on June 29. Among them are James Crisman Hutchison, Trucksville; Luther Wilmer Gregory, Trucksville; and Robert Dillon O'Boyle, Dallas.

Mrs. Lauren Dymond entertained Wednesday night mem-

bers of her card club. Among those present were Philip Cheney, John Nash, Hilda Hughes and Allen Montross.

The Women's Service Club of Shavertown met at the fire hall on Monday night. Attending were Louis Haymaker, Paul Winter, John Edwards, Gordon Austin and Ralph Whipp, among others.

50 Years Ago  
June 18, 1954

## WESTMORELAND GIVES AWARDS AT FINAL ASSEMBLY

American Legion Awards at Westmoreland's final assembly, June 11, went to eighth grade students Sandra Lee Sprout and James Robert Edwards, gift of Black Diamond Post, Kingston; and to senior students Jane Bartells and David Robertson, gift of Daddow-Isaacs Post.

Harveys Lake Girl Scout Troop 65 met at Ricketts Glen last Monday for the last regular session of the year. Among those present were Mrs. Ray Harvey, Mrs. Floyd Milbrodt, Doris Casterline, Charlotte Bidding and Susan Dodd.

King's Daughters Class met in Shavertown Methodist Church Monday with Mrs. George Jacobs presiding. Present were Polly Edwards, Laura Rose, Ruth Shotwell, Gwen Cook and Irma Eicke, among others.

40 Years Ago  
June 18, 1964

## WINNERS OF SORDONI SCHOLARSHIPS ANNOUNCED

A secret which has been no

secret for the past six weeks was disclosed officially by the Back Mountain Protective Association when three winners of the A.J. Sordoni Foundation four-year scholarships were announced. Winners were Charlene Makar, Ronald Hontz and Sharon Strelzyk, all 1964 high school graduates.

Two policewomen were appointed for Lehman Township at the supervisors' meeting Tuesday, on request of Police Chief Joseph Ide. The policewomen will accompany regular officers in any case where a woman is involved. They are Mrs. Rose Ide and Mrs. Florence Davenport.

The new pastors of Dallas Methodist and Lehman Methodist churches, Rev. Robert Sheehan and Rev. Winfield Kelley, will join other Methodist ministers at a refresher course in Ocean City this coming week.

30 Years Ago  
June 20, 1974

## VOLUNTEERS TO BE GUESTS AT GOLDEN JUBILEE DINNER

Workers in the local phase of College Misericordia's capital funds drive will be honored at the college June 25 at the first President's report on the Golden Jubilee Campaign Dinner, hosted by Sister Miriam Teresa, RSM, president of College Misericordia. The event is chaired by campaign leaders Richard F. Laux and David N. Schooley.

Two sophomore boys have been nominated by the Dallas Senior High School and selected by the Dallas Rotary Club to represent them in a gathering of 100 outstanding high school

students at the Leaders Rotary Camp. The boys selected for the camp are David Dierolf, son of Col. and Mrs. William Dierolf, Dallas and Jeffrey Supulski, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Supulski, Dallas.

The Westmoreland Elementary Parent-Teacher Association held its annual Teachers Recognition Dinner on June 6 at the Continental Inn, Luzerne-Dallas Highway. Among the teachers present were Patricia Kirk, David Jones, Susan Butcher and Catherine Flick.

20 Years Ago  
June 20, 1984

## LEHMAN PLANS SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

The Lake-Lehman School District will operate a variety of recreational-instrumental music activities for students and adults of the Lake-Lehman School District community. The program staff includes Rodger Bearde, Mark Kirk, Jean Lipski and Ed Ladamus.

Heather Whipple, age 12, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Whipple, Harveys Lake, was crowned the 1984 Little Miss Harveys Lake during an awards ceremony held Saturday afternoon. Others competing in the contest included Missy Kopko, Justine Ruger, Melissa Roper, Holly Ann Roberts and Crystal King.

Frosting Friends of Luzerne County recently concluded its first fiscal year. New members welcomed were Robert and Kay Vasinda. The evening hostess was Sheryl Stolarick and Mary Gallagher demonstrated uses of the air brush in confectionary art.