

OUR OPINION

More input, not less, wise in hiring teachers

Because we can" is not an adequate reason for members of the Dallas School Board to discount administrators' recommendations as to who should be hired for openings on the teaching staff. That was the gist of explanations given by board President David Usavage and member Gary Mathers at the latest meeting. He and his compatriots on the board owe parents and taxpayers more justification than that for decisions that seem to run counter to common sense and decency.

In hiring a middle school math teacher two months ago, a bare majority of the board chose to pass over a candidate who had been favored throughout the interview regimen by Middle School Principal Anthony Martinelli, Superintendent Gil Griffiths and Assistant Superintendent Michael Speziale. Usavage said math department chairpersons recommended an alternative candidate after the third round of interviews, and that spurred his vote. "I'm going to go with the department chairperson," he said at the time.

Last month, the board hired a new fifth grade teacher whose background was 16 weeks of student teaching in Usavage's first grade classroom in the Wyoming Valley West district. Among the candidates left out was a teacher with several years of experience as a substitute in Dallas schools.

According to the minutes of the June 29 board meeting, that hire and two others were far from unanimous choices, even in the eyes of board members. Maureen Matiska, who has sparred over hiring procedures with the present ruling majority, made it a point to say at the time that the board hired teachers who were ranked fourth, fifth and seventh by its own members. In that round of hiring, the opinion of seasoned administrators apparently was not even sought. In addition to Usavage's former student teacher, at least one of the new teachers was brought into the mix by a board member.

Pressed at the July meeting by concerned parents, Mathers emphasized that the state school code places hiring authority with the board, not the administration. While that is technically correct, it is hardly a strong rationalization for some board members to disregard professional opinion and thumb their noses at the unseemly image this presents. As Erik Dingle said at the meeting, "When you hire your buds and it hits the paper, it looks bad."

This is not an argument for giving administrators sole responsibility for hiring, or for keeping department heads and board members out of interviews. It would seem reasonable and wise for the board to involve all those people in the process. Among the reasons to do so are that members of the school board generally aren't trained educators, nor can they all make it to every interview. Asking for recommendations from people with years of successful experience in the profession is a sign of prudence, not of weakness.

Before the last meeting, high school Principal Frank Galicki and Assistant Principal James McGovern made a presentation that included references to the district's top performance among peers in the region. That achievement has come in part because administrators and past boards have made good decisions about who to hire and how to best use their talents to provide the greatest benefit to students. While there is always room for improvement, it doesn't make any sense for the present board to disregard the skills and insights of administrators with that kind of track record.

MOMENTS IN TIME

The History Channel

• On July 23, 1888, writer Raymond Chandler, creator of detective Philip Marlowe, is born in Chicago. Chandler turned to writing to support himself at the age of 45 and published only seven novels, among them "The Big Sleep" (1939) and "Farewell, My Lovely" (1946).

• On July 25, 1898, during the Spanish-American War, U.S. forces invade Puerto Rico, one of Spain's two principal possessions in the Caribbean. With little resistance and only seven deaths, U.S. troops were able to secure the island by mid-August. In December, the Treaty of Paris was signed, ending the war and officially ceding Puerto Rico to the United States.

• On July 19, 1935, the first automatic parking meter in the United States is installed in Oklahoma City. The Park-O-Meter accepted nickels and was planted in concrete at the head of each 20-foot space.

• On July 21, 1955, the final episode of the popular radio program "The Roy Rogers Show" airs. The show, which debuted in 1944, was a mix of music and drama and always closed with the song "Happy Trails," which soon became known as Rogers' theme song.

• On July 20, 1969, at 10:56 p.m. EDT, American astronaut Neil Armstrong, 240,000 miles from Earth, steps off the lunar landing module Eagle and becomes the first human to walk on the surface of the moon.

• On July 22, 1991, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer is arrested at his apartment in Milwaukee. The apartment was littered with human remains, and Dahmer later confessed to 17 murders in all, dating back to his first victim in 1978.

• On July 24, 1998, Enron Corp., the Houston-based electricity and gas titan, inks a lavish deal to acquire British-based Wessex Water, PLC for the sum of \$2.2 billion, which was reportedly paid in cash.

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THE POST

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Crowds of people lined up eagerly for speedboat rides and what looks like a water ski show at Hanson's on Harveys Lake. This photo was dated 1964.

OTHER OPINION

A jail isn't the right place for many offenders

By State Senator
Robert J. Thompson

Like most states, Pennsylvania has traditionally used incarceration as its answer to the problems associated with crime and illegal drugs.

Having added 13 new prisons since 1992, Pennsylvania now spends five cents out of every state dollar on the Department of Corrections — more than the spending for every other state program and service except basic education and medical assistance. But these brick and mortar programs haven't resolved the problem. In fact, some claim that all they've done is create a demand for more bricks and mortar.

I firmly believe in the penal system. Violent people need to be put behind bars and kept there for a long time, both to protect society and to send the message that we will not tolerate that kind of behavior. To that end, Pennsylvania's prison population has exploded from 8,000 in 1980 to a projected 42,000 by year's end and violent offenders here serve the second longest prison sentences in the country.

However, our prisons have also become a dumping ground for people having problems that could be handled better and cheaper through other methods. Seven years ago, seri-

ous violent and property offenders made up 58 percent of our prison population. That figure has since dropped to 50 percent with increasing numbers of non-violent offenders and parole rule violators — often suffering from addiction and mental illness — accounting for the difference.

Incarceration in a \$28,000-a-year taxpayer-funded cell is not necessarily the best answer in the way we handle those people who have committed less serious, non-violent crimes. Mandatory sentencing provisions and other measures have limited some of the discretion that judges have in handling low-risk offenders. Legislation pending in the General Assembly would open up more alternatives to judges when sentencing low-risk offenders.

Another area that could be addressed involves reducing the recidivism rate by better preparing inmates for lives as productive citizens when they return home. About 13,000 inmates will be released from our prisons this year. The more that can be done to get them ready to come back into society, the better off we're all going to be. The research is clear: somebody who's clean and dry and employed has much less chance of getting in trouble than somebody who has an alcohol or drug problem and

doesn't have a job or a place to live.

Without much public notice, Pennsylvania and other states have started taking steps to cut the recidivism rate. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has increased its emphasis on rehabilitation by teaching inmates construction skills, offering parenting and citizenship programs and even helping inmates keep ties with their families through video teleconferences.

In Erie, a broad alliance of state and local agencies is using a federal grant to hire special caseworkers who coordinate and facilitate a wide range of services for inmates. These services start before they leave prison, then following them through a pre-release center and ultimately home, making sure they have the tools they need to succeed outside the walls. The annual cost of this program is much less than the bill for a year in prison.

A lot more is happening and the new focus on prisoner re-entry is symbolic of an emerging and remarkable bipartisan consensus on crime and punishment. Legislators and citizens are beginning to look at the criminal justice system in a different light than they did a few years ago.

The clash between competing philosophies of punishment

and treatment is giving way to a policy and political middle ground that seeks both goals — and in the process — strikes a better balance between public safety and public spending. A new piece of federal prisoner reentry legislation reflects that balance. So does an upcoming report by the Council of State Governments' Re-Entry Policy Council. The group of 100 corrections and social services leaders from across the country agreed on hundreds of pages of action steps necessary to ensure a smooth transition from prison to the community.

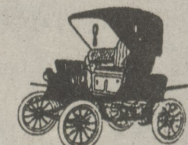
Being tough means being willing to take a hard look at history and learn its lessons. Currently 44 percent of our inmates return to prison within three years of release, and we can't expect to change that recidivism rate unless we adopt new ideas and strategies. Neglecting inmate re-entry and alternative sentencing has wasted lives, created more crime, and contributed heavily to our budget crisis. A new direction can both save us money and make us safer.

Sen. Robert Thompson (R-West Chester), chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, served as co-chairman of the Public Safety and Justice Task Force for the Council of State Governments.

70 Years Ago
July 20, 1934

SHAVERTOWN FIRE COMPANY CARNIVAL

The fourth annual carnival of Shavertown firemen will begin on Saturday, Aug. 18, and will be one of the most ambitious affairs ever planned by that company.



ONLY YESTERDAY

Cortez Jennings, general chairman, this week selected committee chairmen. The affair will be held on the Downer Estate on Main Street.

For the first time in many months, Wilkes-Barre Traction Company used the line beyond Dallas on Sunday. Five trolley cars were used to transport picnickers to the vicinity of College Misericordia where a Polish picnic was held.

One of the nicest brown trout caught in this vicinity in some time was displayed by John Yaple last Saturday. The fish weighed two pounds and measured 16 1/2 inches in length.

60 Years Ago
July 21, 1944

RADIO ENGINEER IS MISSING IN ITALY

A former Dallas High School student, who had completed 28 of his 30 bombing missions over enemy territory in the Italian and Mediterranean areas is reported missing in action over Italy. He is Tech Sgt. Otto W. "Duke" Harzdorf, 25, grandson of Mrs. Paul Harzdorf of Center Moreland, who reared him after the death of his mother a number of years ago.

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

40 Years Ago
July 16, 1964

NEW COMMANDER FOR LEGION POST

Gus S. Shuleski, West Center Hill Road, was elected commander of Dadow-Isaacs American Legion Post 672 at a meeting on Friday. Mr. Shuleski, who will succeed George Cave at installation in October, is employed as assistant superintendent at General Cigar Company, Kingston. He is presently the post historian.

Roberts Memorial Campground in East Dallas is the scene this year of the beginning of the 91st New York Conference of the Free Methodist Church, which started yesterday. Presiding will be Bishop Paul N. Ellis, Indianapolis, Ind., who will bring messages Wednesday night and Sunday morning.

50 Years Ago
July 16, 1954

BACK MT. YMCA TO OPEN PLAYGROUND

The Back Mountain Town and Country YMCA will operate a playground at Dallas Borough School three days a week for seven weeks. It is jointly sponsored by the Dallas Rotary and Dallas Kiwanis clubs, with a paid instructor. The playground will operate Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays until September 7.

Yvonne M. Schlitter, Midland Drive, Dallas, enlisted in the United States Navy this week at the Wilkes-Barre recruiting station. After being sworn in at Philadelphia, she will go to the United States Navy Training Center at Bainbridge, Md., for 11 weeks training.

Fire originating in garbage cans at the rear of the building shortly before noon Wednesday completely destroyed the \$40,000 home of Dadow-Isaacs Post American Legion on Huntsville Road, Dallas. The loss is partly covered by insurance, \$20,000 on the building and \$10,000 on contents.

30 Years Ago
July 18, 1974

NEWBERRY ESTATE RESTAURANTS TO BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The Dallas Township Planning Hearing Board met Monday night in the township building and granted permission to the Newberry Estate to open the lodge and recreation building to the public. John and Oliver Troup, owners of the property, were present at the meeting with their attorneys. The board agreed to notify the men of their decision Tuesday.

Ralph Lewis, Back Mountain Memorial Library Auctioneer, said Tuesday that he anticipated a gross of just under \$30,000 from the 28th annual auction held last weekend.

He said that it appears the net would match last year's and perhaps exceed it, in excess of \$25,000. The book booth did a tremendous job with a profit of \$1,300 and Monday night's sale of auction items grossed \$2,700 in less than four hours.

College Misericordia has been named the recipient of a state Act 101 grant again this year to fund the college's program for area educationally or economically challenged students. Seventeen students are enrolled in the Act 101 program this summer, bring the total number of students involved over the years to 78. This year's grant is \$7,000 more than last year, noted Sister Carolyn Burgholzer, RSM, executive vice president of the college.

20 Years Ago
July 18, 1984

DALLAS FIREWORKS ATTRACT HUNDREDS

The annual fireworks display sponsored by the Dallas Recreation Center on July 5 attracted hundreds of on-lookers. The aerial show proved to be a success even with poor weather conditions.

The Veterans Administration is urging veterans and employers to take advantage of the "Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act." VA administrator Barry N. Walters said that there is still time and money available for participants in the program. The program has been operational since November and as of May 7, 1984, more than 120,000 veterans have been granted certificates of eligibility.

Lake-Lehman School Board members granted a total of \$13,700 to six district administrators at its July 10th meeting. The increases in the administrators' salaries passed by a narrow 5-4 margin, with the exception of Anthony Marchakus, assistant to the superintendent's increase, which passed by a 6-3 vote.