

# **Information Packet**

For Public Distribution

**For the  
December 2, 2009  
Board of Education Meeting**

# **Information Packet Index**

**December 2, 2009**

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**REGULAR MEETING**

President Mexicotte called meeting to order at 5:35pm

Trustees Mexicotte, Patalan, Baskett, Friedman (arrived at 5:54) and Nelson present

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Nelson, moved to recess immediately to Executive Session for the purposes of negotiations and informal superintendent evaluation.

Recessed to Executive Session at 5:37 pm.

**RESUME REGULAR MEETING**

**CALL TO ORDER**

7:04 pm

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Trustee Gates-Bryant

**ROLL CALL**

Present – Trustees Baskett, Friedman (Treasurer), Gates-Bryant, Mexicotte (President), Nelson (Secretary), Patalan (Vice President)

Absent – Trustee Hollier

Administration present – Margolis, Trent, Aeschbach, Allen, Dickinson-Kelley, Pogliano, Osinski (Recorder)

Guests – Eric Formberg and Caryn Bock (Plante/Moran), Jenni Lane, Margi Long

**INTRODUCTION OF NON-VOTING MEMBER AT THE TABLE**

President Mexicotte introduced Dr. Todd Roberts, Superintendent of Schools.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Approved by consent.

**STUDENT PERFORMANCE – Thurston 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Choir – Yael Rothfeld**

**CELEBRATION OF EXCELLENCE**

Jan Mackenzie, Counselor @ Slauson Middle School

Nominated by: Toni Burton and Janae Townsend

Announced by: Deb Mexicotte

**GOLD STAR AWARDS PRESENTED TO:**

Kitt Flynn, Media Specialist @ Ann Arbor Open

Armand Campbell, Custodian @ Slauson

**PUBLIC COMMENTARY**

- The Erkkinen family spoke about the need to retain funding of the arts.
- William Hampton reminded the community of the services they offer to African American students and thanked the Superintendent and Board for their support.
- Steve Norton spoke about the consequences of not passing the millage and urged the public to become informed of the district finances.
- Christine Stead spoke about the district finances, millage and offered her support to move forward.
- Ann Nichols requested venue for Science Olympiad. Dr. Roberts noted that a date has been secured at Skyline.

**FIRST BRIEFING**

Curriculum Recommendations of the Sexual Health Education Advisory Committee

Jenni Lane and Margi Long were available to discuss the curriculum and reference material recommendations for Health Education classes. Abstinence is profoundly recommended in both the texts and the law. The recommended material will enhance the current curriculum. The State is updating middle school texts and a bill is in the legislature now to allow school districts to choose whether or not they teach sex education, but they must teach medically correct HIV/AIDS & STD information.

Sexual orientation and gender identity was added to the list of objectives for classroom instruction.

The Public can contact the Board office to get further information about the items presented.

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

No comment.

**REPORTS**

**Youth Senate** – Weekly lunchtime Action Meetings will be held at Pioneer & Huron. High school student concerns include needing better communication with administration, off-campus privileges, ACT/SAT prep, better counselor accessibility and scheduling classes to meet the new graduation requirements. Senate has produced the Teen Yellow Pages, a useful resource for students.

**Ann Arbor Parent Advisory Committee** – reported on Disability Awareness Workshops scheduled at various elementary schools. Lecture by Judy Coucouvanis “Helping your child get along in the world: strategies for social success” will be offered December 3, 7pm at Skyline. Concerned about renewal of the WISD special education millage with the recent failure of the county-wide enhancement millage proposal.

**BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Planning** – Met Nov. 10 to review SHEAC recommendations and Pioneer renovation bid award being presented tonight. Met Nov. 17 to review the sunset and expiring policies and divide among committees for in-depth review. Next meeting is scheduled for December 8 at 6:00 pm.

**Performance** – Met Nov. 9 to receive an update on Preschool and Headstart program. Also received process for student entry into alternative programs. Next meeting is Nov. 19 at 2:00 pm to review the quarterly report.

**SPECIAL BRIEFING**

Great Start Readiness Participation Resolution (GSRP) for Early Childhood funding

Ms. Pogliano, Assistant Principal, and Lee Ann Dickinson-Kelley, provided an update on the Preschool and Headstart programs. Approximately 600 children and families are served at the Preschool. Preschool staff have made connections in the community to provide informational sessions for families. They identify younger siblings of students in our schools to bring them in.

A strong effort has been made in marketing and communication about the Preschool. Currently going through the accreditation process. Trustees are impressed with the program. Dr. Roberts thanked Ms. Pogliano and staff for stepping up in Ms Toigo's absence.

2009/10 Educational Foundation Grant Awards

Ms. Correll provided an update on the awards from the Educational Foundation. Twenty-one grants have been presented – totaling \$16,000; with approximately \$10,000 more in grants to be awarded later. Award winners will be shown on their website. In addition to the grant awards, the Foundation supports 3 programs – MyAccess licensing, Plan and Explore, and Elementary Enrichment coordinators. The Ed Foundation is available to accept *in lieu* of the defeated enhancement millage. The Foundation can only fund what is approved through the strategic plan. They already have received over \$7500, and a matching donor pledge up to \$10,000 from. Trustees are grateful to the Ed Foundation for their assistance to this district.

**FIRST BRIEFING**

09-037 Pioneer renovation contract award for Rec & Ed

Ms. Aeschbach and Mr. Trent presented the contract award to install moveable "walls" to build offices in E-wing at Pioneer. Should be completed by January.

2008/09 Annual Financial Report

The 08/09 Annual Financial report was presented in Powerpoint by Plante & Moran. The presentation and report will be on our website for public access. The district received a clean opinion, meaning the district's practices complied with or exceeded government accounting standards. Mr. Formberg detailed and echoed concerns expressed by the Board about the decrease in state revenue. He indicated that a reserve is necessary for cash flow. If the reserve is used to manage deficits, it is unlikely the district would be able to replenish it in the foreseeable future.

**SECOND BRIEFING** – scheduled for approval at this meeting

**ACTION – CONSENT AGENDA** – scheduled for approval at this meeting

Acceptance of 2009/10 Educational Foundation Grant Awards

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant moved to accept the Educational Foundation grant awards for the 2009/10 school year. On roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, Trustee Hollier absent.

Great Start Readiness Participation Resolution (GSRP) for Early Childhood funding

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant, moved to approve the Michigan Department of Education 2009-10 Great Start Readiness Program Participating Resolution as presented. On roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, Trustee Hollier absent.

Approve Minutes of the 10/1/09 Executive Session and Minutes of the 10/28/09 Regular meeting

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant, moved to approve the minutes of the 10/1/09 Executive Session and the 10/28/09 Regular Meeting. On roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, Trustee Hollier absent.

Approve Trustee Expense Reimbursements

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant, moved to approve the trustee expense reimbursements as presented. On roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, Trustee Hollier absent.

Gift Offers

Vice President Patalan, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant, moved to accept the gift offers as presented. On roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, Trustee Hollier absent.

**ACTION – BOARD ITEMS**

Recreation Advisory Commission (RAC) appointments

Trustee Nelson, supported by Trustee Gates-Bryant, moved to appoint Annie-Norah Beveridge and Arjun Kalra to the Recreation Advisory Commission. On voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. Trustee Hollier absent.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Dr. Roberts gave his report. In addition, he noted that the district is expected to lose \$10-\$15 million in funding from the state for the 2010-11 school year. Administration will be addressing funding issues with an eye to keeping changes from the classroom as much as possible. Will be coming to the board 12/2 with recommendations. Community meetings will be held with district staff in December and in early January for their input on funding issues. Hope to have a draft budget by end of February. Will be looking at a long-range budget strategy to address the likely decline in funding. Need to come together in these discussions to effectively server our students.

**ITEMS FOR AGENDA PLANNING**

None

**ITEMS FROM THE BOARD**

President Mexicotte noted that Robin Bailey has worked hard to get a grant from the Kennedy Center for our music program. She attended Parent/Teacher conferences at Pioneer that went smoothly. Volunteers were cheerful.

Vice President Patalan reflected on the outcome of the November 3 election. Thankful for the teachers, proud of citizens of Ann Arbor who did pass the millage, appreciative to the Citizens Millage Committee and all others who worked tirelessly to pass the millage. Sent a special thank you to Trustee Nelson for his work with the millage. Most grateful for Todd Robert's leadership and putting forward a Strategic Plan from which the district can frame its priorities.

Trustee Nelson attended the Freedom Fund Dinner. Noted that the Citizens Millage Committee was run by volunteers and thanked them for their service and effort.

Trustee Baskett attended the Freedom Fund Dinner and thanked the Superintendent and board for supporting this event. Noted one principal attended. Met with the Youth Senate; looking forward to the social climate work. Concerned about budgets. Thanked Huron for their Challenge Day and making this available for kids.

Trustee Gates-Bryant announced her resignation for personal reasons which require her to move out of state. She thanked the public for their support. She commented that the board and

administration have always remained focused on student achievement. This district/board will be faced with difficult choices, but she's very confident that the board is up for the challenge. Encouraged the board to stay the course, and not to be deterred.

Trustees expressed their appreciation and fondness for Helen and wished her well.

Trustee Gates-Bryant put forward the vacancy appointment process as recommended by the Planning Committee, and read the draft press release outlining requirements of candidates. Trustees suggested that they solicit the community to suggest questions to ask of the candidates. This will be added to the press release.

Recommended that candidates are nominated, then voted on. Multiple nominations will be decided by majority; top vote getters will move on to next round. Need to determine how to handle ties. Nominations and appointment will occur at the Dec 16 meeting. Trustees didn't want to guide candidate presentations, so it was decided that pre-determined questions or time limits will be specified.

Will check Trustee Hollier's schedule to confirm meeting dates.

**ADJOURNMENT**

11:15 pm



## NewsBeat

AnnArbor.com/news

11/24/09

ANN ARBOR

### Meeting to talk about Mack Pool

The future of Ann Arbor's Mack Pool will be the topic of discussion Thursday as supporters of the city-owned pool meet to evaluate options for saving it from closing.

The public is encouraged to attend a meeting hosted by the Mack Pool Task Force, a group of Ann Arbor citizens and community leaders looking for ways to cut costs and increase revenues at the indoor pool.

"We still think the community should have a year-round pool," said Ed Sketch, coordinator of the task force and a member of Friends of Mack Pool.

"Our goal to try to get the pool to be self-sustaining. It's not an easy problem, but that's our approach."

Mack Pool operations currently require a nearly \$100,000 annual subsidy from the city's general fund, which has city officials considering closing it.

Thursday's meeting is set from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the media center at Ann Arbor Open School at Mack, 715 Brooks St., near Seventh and Miller.

Ann. Com

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online

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1 Vote

VOTE

# Big demand for swine flu vaccine closes Washtenaw County clinic line early

Posted: 11:20 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 14, 2009.

35 Comments. Comment Now



The line of people waiting to get a wristband so they could get the H1N1 vaccine during Saturday, November 14th's clinic held at Pioneer High School, stretched from the school all the way to Main Street.

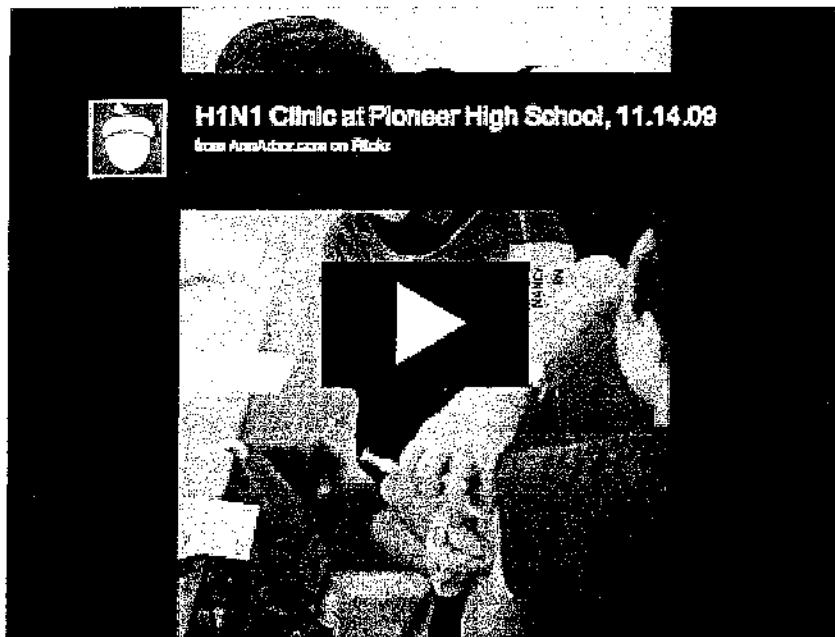
Lon Horwedel | AnnArbor.com

A swine flu vaccine clinic held at Pioneer High School drew so many Washtenaw County residents Saturday morning that officials closed the line to receive wristbands for the vaccine a half hour after the clinic officially began.

It was the third mass vaccination clinic for the swine flu, or H1N1 flu, vaccine in the county so far and shows demand is still outpacing supply.

The county has been largely distributing its vaccines via the mass vaccination mode., rather than relying on individual doctor offices, because there is still a shortage of the vaccine coming in from the state. There were about 2,000 doses available on Saturday.

"What we hope people understand is we don't have enough vaccine for all of (Washtenaw County residents) who are in these priority groups," said Susan Cerniglia, a county health department spokeswoman. "This is the fastest, safest, most efficient way to get it to people."



See additional coverage about the swine flu, or H1N1 flu, virus in Washtenaw County

The next available clinic for the H1N1 flu vaccine will be next Sunday, Nov. 22 at the Eastern Michigan University Convocation Center. A time for that clinic and the number of available doses have not yet been determined. "We expect to have enough to make it worth people's while to go," Cerniglia said.

Officials knew there was a lot of interest remaining for the vaccine, but were not sure what sort of turnout to expect for Saturday's clinic. The first flu shot clinic held late last month, which had about 1,000 doses available at the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, was quickly overwhelmed by worried parents with their kids and members of other priority groups. Several hundred were turned away from the line.

The county's second clinic, which had 4,000 doses available for the highest priority groups in Washtenaw County, saw big lines early in the day at EMU's Convocation Center, which later tapered off. About 1,500 doses were left over by the end of the day.

So county health officials opened Saturday's clinic up to expanded priority groups with some trepidation about how many residents would show and announced an additional upcoming date for H1N1 vaccinations even though it has not yet received an allotted shipment of doses from the state for that clinic yet.



Jackson Peiter, 5, Chelsea, reacts as he gets the nasal version of the H1N1 vaccine during Saturday, November 14th's clinic held at Pioneer High School.

Lon Horwedel | AnnArbor.com

Early in the day, the line at Pioneer extended from the high school's main entrance, wrapped around the parking lot and reached out to South Main Street. By around 9:30 a.m., about 600 wristbands - each wristband represents one dose of the vaccine - were still available, but 800 to 900 people were standing in line.

Demand is believed to be so high, in part, because the county opened up the clinic to additional priority groups.

The clinic allowed all young people between the ages of 6 months and 24 years of age to get the vaccine. Adults between 25 years and 64 years of age with underlying health conditions that put them at greater risk of having complications from the flu were also eligible. Those health conditions include chronic lung disease, a weakened immune system, cancer, diabetes, kidney or liver disorders, cardiovascular disease and other conditions.

Priority groups for the vaccine clinic still include pregnant women, caregivers of children younger than 6 months old and health care workers. Those who are 65 and older are not in the Centers for Disease Control guidelines to receive priority in receiving the vaccine.

*Tina Reed covers health and the environment for AnnArbor.com. You can reach her at*

**CommunityForum**  
Letters from our readers

AA.com  
11/15/09

## **Public schools need reform, not less money**

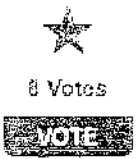
Just who is Albert Berriz, treasurer of "Citizens for a Responsible Washtenaw" anti-millage group? What are his educational leadership qualifications?

It sounds to me that he's a "right-winger." He reminds me of the Business Round Table members who have, over the years, done all they could to bash public schools, with a goal to eventually eliminate public education. An easy way to do this is with false accusations, fear, negativity and bullying schools into operating a viable program with insufficient money.

Taxes are the membership fees we pay to maintain a civilized society. Our public schools are the foundation of our democracy. Lack of money threatens to undermine our nation's strengths of creativity and innovation of our successful educational system.

Numerous reports on funding public schools have called for structural reforms, but none of the reports have called for less revenue for public schools. We need to find innovative ways to pay for what we value in our public schools. We need to restore confidence in our schools and to support our excellent teachers and local School Boards. An educated citizenry is a requisite in a democracy.

— June A. Rusten, Ann Arbor



# Washtenaw County schools, residents continue school budget discussions

Posted by [Washtenaw County Schools](#) on 11/11/14

64 Comments, Comments Off

The stark reality facing the Saline school district, Superintendent Scot Graden says, is the district will become insolvent by the middle of next year if cuts aren't made.

That's a future Graden doesn't want to see.

"The board of education and I have made it clear that this is NOT an option," Graden wrote in a recent e-mail to district parents. "We have begun the process of assessing the ramifications of our current shortfall and exploring the options for solving (it)."

Saline isn't the only local school district facing such dire straits. The buzz over school funding is continuing strong, nearly two weeks after voters turned down a 2-mil countywide enhancement millage that would have raised \$30 million for the 30 traditional school districts in Washtenaw County.

School officials and school boards are weighing massive cuts in their programs, teachers are worrying about layoffs, residents are organizing reform efforts and community meetings are being scheduled.

## The schools

In school board meetings across Washtenaw County since the vote, more details about budget shortfalls are emerging.

The deficits aren't the product of the failed millage vote. Instead, they're the outcome of nearly \$300 per student cuts from each school district's state funding over the last month. Ann Arbor has seen almost double that amount cut per student.

Per-pupil state aid is a school district's main source of revenue.

"Based on up-to-date staffing, adjustments in special education reimbursement, declining enrollment and a \$292 per-pupil reduction, we have a \$2 million shortfall for the (current) 2009-2010 school year," Graden wrote. "And based on a conservative estimates-per-pupil state funding cut of \$300, an expected decline in enrollment (the size difference between the graduating class and a typical incoming kindergarten class), and increases in salaries, health care, energy, etc., we project an additional shortfall of \$3.4 million next year."

That's a combined \$5.4 million deficit in the next 18 months, Graden said, noting as a point of reference that the district's current fund balance is \$3.4 million - 5.6 percent of its \$59 million total budget. Independent auditors recommend a 10 percent to 15 percent fund balance for a district of Saline's size, Graden said.

Graden has scheduled a "Community Conversation" about finances for 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday night in the Liberty School auditorium.

Saline's school board also voted last Tuesday to direct Graden to reopen the district's contract with teachers.

Similar conversations will begin soon in all the area's school districts, superintendents said.

### **Private citizens**

Albert Berriz jokes the work of running his company, McKinley Inc., is piling up as he has meetings on school financing.

Berriz was one of the key drivers behind the millage defeat. He spent at least \$75,000 of his company's money to fund the anti-millage campaign.

And he took flack for the move from those who said he was doing so to save his real estate company a lot of money on taxes.

Not true, he said.

"I've never been unwilling to tax myself if there's a good reason for the tax," he said, pointing to his support of Ann Arbor's greenbelt millage.

But he says school districts haven't done enough to manage their budgets before asking people for more money in a tough economic time.

Berriz outlined several steps he believes districts should take now:

- Look closely at consolidation to make sure buildings are running efficiently at capacity. He doesn't see a reason buildings should be running 75 percent full. "There's going to be survivors and losers. I do believe that the probability that this county will have 11 district overheads (including the Washtenaw Intermediate School District) is not high, but the kids don't have to suffer in that. They can still get a good education."
- Compelatively bid out support services and health insurance coverage. He said he pays more for health insurance for his company's 1,200 employees than he does in property damage insurance on his properties, a main reason he bids his company's insurance regularly. That generates savings for his company, money he thinks the school districts can also realize.
- Open up Ann Arbor as a school's of choice district, drawing in students from around the county. They would increase revenues in Ann Arbor and also work to further diversify schools.

Berriz also said districts should become more transparent about their finances and the moves they intend to make.

"What I'm trying to get (school officials) to understand is that when they are transparent people trust them," he said. "When they are opaque (as they are now) people's fears that something is wrong are magnified."

He knows his ideas are controversial. And that tough times are likely to continue.

"These topics are all about the center because they don't affect the kids," he said. "The likelihood that you will see a building boom in any (Washtenaw County) township is less than zero. There's going to be no new construction. The value of the existing tax base will continue to decline. Plus, on the sales tax, there's less disposable income now."

Berriz said he also knows there's the potential for emotional pleas from parents to save the programs their kids are involved in.

"We don't have to be a divided community on this topic. We can come together and move forward."

An Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman worries that division may already be happening.

"There were two main reasons people voted against the millage," he said. "One is they said I don't want to raise my taxes in tough times. That's a very honest view that I understand and I sympathize with. While it is painful to see taxes go up, it's even more pain to see education deteriorate. (However) that's a legitimate and fair argument (against the millage)."

The other argument, Friedman said, is the school district is being mismanaged. He said people were misled and didn't understand the district's finances.

"They said there needed to be more transparency. I'm sorry. There's plenty of transparency and transparency doesn't pay teachers," he said. "There have been consistent efforts in this district to pare down our administration."

Friedman said he's afraid the district is on the verge of a return to several years ago, where board meetings were filled with divisiveness and superintendents were regularly run out of town. But he said he hopes it will be the opposite and the community will come together.

"In the short-term, there's going to be cuts that need to be made and now the community responds will be the key in if we look back in three years and say we did a hell of a job of solving this problem or if we look back and say we fought when we should have thought," Friedman said.

### **Reform efforts**

Not all the efforts are taking place at the local level.

Several parents, district employees and school board members traveled to Lansing to lobby lawmakers for restoration of funding and health care reform.



Heritage Newspapers (heritage.com)

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Ann Arbor Journal > News

## 'Ask the Conductor' program draws interest at Logan Elementary School

Monday, November 16, 2009

By Lisa Allmendinger, A2 Journal

Ishani Pandya took note of how Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra conductor Ari Lipsky held his bow while playing a cello during an "Ask the Conductor" program at Logan Elementary School Nov. 10.

The fifth-grade student, who plays the violin, says she learned how to hold her bow properly during the musical performance.

Classmate Marc Ybarra, who says he plans to play the flute next year but now performs on the clarinet, carefully watched Lipsky's finger placement while the conductor played the instrument.

Jesse Cheng says he learned that he needs to practice a lot to be a good musician.

Lynne Gulick, a fourth-grade teacher who coordinated the maestro's visit, says she wanted the students at Logan to hear how music develops character and leadership.

In addition, the event serves as an introduction to formal music for the younger students, she says.

In fifth grade students can chose band or orchestra and pick which instrument they would like to play.

"Music is close to my heart," Gulick says, who has played the violin, piano and bagpipes.

Before he spoke, Gulick says she hoped that the talk would serve as an introduction to the idea that music can become a career choice.

"It's something that expands (the students') world and their possibilities," she said.

Lipsky says he began playing the flute at age 6 while living in Israel. At 7 years old, he says he was playing solo for the local symphony orchestra.

From there, he added the cello to his repertoire and, at 16 years old, he was offered an opportunity to conduct the local orchestra.

"Music is a wonderful way to make friends," Lipsky told the children, adding that some of the friends he made through music are still his friends today.

"It was really fun," Jessie Baker says of the event.

Although still living in Buffalo, N.Y., Lipsky has spent the last 10 years as the conductor of the Ann Arbor Symphony.

He visits about 30 schools a year working with high school string quartets and orchestras, as well as programs for younger students, says Laura Dunbar, education and outreach director for the orchestra.

Lisa Allmendinger can be reached at 1-877-995-NEWS (6397) or at [lallmendinger@heritage.com](mailto:lallmendinger@heritage.com).

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Ann Arbor Journal > News

## Ann Arbor students live out fairytale

Monday, November 16, 2009

By Lisa Allmendinger, A2 Journal

### Fast Facts

Lakewood School Fairy Door Tour

Part of a two-week long cross-curricular enrichment project that emphasizes imagination

Fairy doors in downtown Ann Arbor, number and locations vary

For more information: [www.urban-fairies.com](http://www.urban-fairies.com)

Once upon a time in downtown Ann Arbor, 23 Lakewood kindergarteners spent a morning searching for urban fairy doors in their native habitat.

With the help of two self-described fairyologists -- Kathleen Wright, their kindergarten teacher, and her husband, Jonathan Wright -- the wee folk were able to find about five of them.

The field trip was part of a two-week enrichment project that allows kids to learn through science, art, reading, storytelling and writing with a big emphasis on imagination, Kathleen Wright says.

Some of the doors the children found were exterior doors, while others were interior ones.

Thomas Rhodes, 5, says he saw a fairy inside one of the doors.

"I saw a girl fairy," said Audrey Bremer.

There was also a dirty goblin door with soot and trash around it, which grabbed the attention of Brendan McCann, Evan Dunham and Joe Williams, who thought it was the best door on the tour.

"I encourage them to use their imagination and think of the possibilities using mythical habitat," their teacher says.

Kelvyn Williams, one of the adult chaperones, was impressed with "the uniqueness of the fairy doors and walking around with someone who knows where they are."

Besides, he says, it was nice to have a morning off to wander around downtown Ann Arbor.

After viewing the tiny portals at the Solo Shevel Gallery, The Ark, Red Shoes and Peaceable Kingdom, the group headed to Sweetwaters Café, where the kindergarteners were treated to "fairy snacks."

A fairy snack is a postage stamp-sized jam sandwich, a berry, a min-cookie and a thimble-sized glass of lemonade, all served on one napkin.

Clara Smith says the large raspberry was the best fairy treat.

The children also took a trip to the Wrights' home, where there are several fairy doors.

The field trip follows lessons in animal and human habitats from around the world.

Kathleen Wright added the fairy door tour into her curriculum about four years ago.

Working in small groups, the 5- and 6-year-olds will create their own fairy habitats using recycled materials, says Christopher Cerda, whose daughter, Claire, is in the class. She wore her special fairy T-shirt on the tour.

More information about urban fairies can be found at [www.urban-fairies.com](http://www.urban-fairies.com).

Lisa Allmendinger can be reached at 1-877-995-NEWS (6397) or at [liallendinger@heritage.com](mailto:liallendinger@heritage.com).

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Life

## Ann Arbor teen helping Lakota reservation

Monday, November 16, 2009

By Sara Waisanen, Special Writer

Emma Griffith doesn't look Native American, but a part of her is.

Last summer, the 15-year-old Ann Arbor resident connected with her Native American roots when she went on a mission trip to a reservation in Chamberlain, S.D.

The First United Methodist Church youth group, which Griffith is a member of, spent a week at the Lakota reservation building a house.

"It was devastating and heartbreaking to see what these people lived in," Griffith said. "(They) should have been condemned."

Griffith was not expecting to see people living the way they were. Faucets did not work and insides of homes were falling down, she said.

Children were so carefree running around the reservation, Griffith said. It made her sad to think of the burden they'll have in the future.

"It all just showed me how much we take for granted," she said. "It made me want to make a difference."

Griffith is the president of Skyline High School's theatre guild and a member of Young People's Theater. She knew she had to do something to help the Lakota tribe when she found out the school was going to perform "Annie Get Your Gun."

One of the characters in the play is "Sitting Bull," who is also a member of the Lakota tribe in Chamberlain, S.D., where Griffith worked this past summer.

"I want to help find their voice. I feel like they've lost theirs," she said.

One of the things Griffith knew they needed was clothing.

"They have a lot of need," she said.

Griffith is collecting articles of clothing for the reservation and encourages anyone who would like to donate to do so. She is planning on sending all collected items to the reservation by Sunday.

Clothing can be dropped off at Young People's Theater, 401 West Morgan, in Ann Arbor or contact Emma at

omgr15th@aol.com and she will make arrangements to pick up the clothing

Clothing also can be dropped off at the "Annie Get Your Gun Performances" at Skyline High School. Performance dates are Saturday and Sunday.

"It's a small change," she said. "It's a step in the right direction."

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# AAPS News

News, features, profiles and activities in The Ann Arbor Public Schools

**Inside:** • Veteran Technology Education instructor Gary Graff loves teaching at Scarlett Middle School, page 2 • A letter from the superintendent, page 2 • District partners with U-M Health System for depression training, page 3 • Other news from Tappan, Pioneer and Skyline, page 4

Detailed stories online at [news.a2schools.org](http://news.a2schools.org)

## School funding

With the recent county millage defeat and continuing school financing discussions at the state level, Ann Arbor school officials are planning information sessions with the community early next year. Superintendent Todd Roberts offers an update on the school funding situation on page 2 of today's edition. Details about upcoming meetings will be published in the Nov. 30 edition of the AAPS News.

A bi-monthly newsletter

Issue No. 2, November 16, 2009

# Learning large

Students invited outdoors for hands-on lessons



Dave Szczygiel squeezes water from peat moss.

## Giving support

The AAPS Science and Environmental Education Endowment Fund through The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation is in place to help keep environmental and science programs in Ann Arbor viable long term. To date, the endowment has about \$115,000 and has a goal of raising \$5 million.

**Details:** The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, 201 S. Main St., Suite 501, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Call: 734-663-0401.



## Featured story

By Casey Hans  
AAPS News Service

Want to tell Dave Szczygiel to take a hike? He's likely to do just that.

The Ann Arbor district's environmental education consultant can be found most weekdays visiting one of many area parks, wetlands and waterways with students. As he likes to say, "my classroom is out here."

On this day, he dips into his treasure chest of assorted dried fungi, antlers and magazine clippings and calls upon his years of knowledge as a teacher and naturalist to keep the attention of a busload of Lakewood Elementary School fourth-graders.

They were headed for the Waterloo State Recreation Area west of Ann Arbor. "Who knows what FBI stands for?" he queries. In his line of work, it's not a widely known federal agency, but "fungus, bacteria and invertebrates," he tells students.

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has had an Environmental Educa-

tion program since 1959, founded by William B. Stapp with the help of Maxine Smith Miles, according to information from the district.

The Ann Arbor program took off with the dedication of Stapp who wrote lesson plans for every grade level, said teacher Bill Browning who succeeded Stapp to run the program in 1968. Browning explained that Michigan was one of the leading states when environmental education first came on the scene and Ann Arbor's K-12 program was the first of its kind in the country.

"It was very well received, even though it wasn't inclusive of all classes," Browning recalled. "The real secret of the success of this program is they got it into the curriculum as an accepted part."

After Browning retired, Szczygiel moved into the post. He is a biology major who found education the best route to take for a guy who grew up around nature and worked summers as a naturalist for the YMCA. "If you don't

See *Environmental Education*, page 3



Fourth-graders from Ann Arbor's Lakewood Elementary School taste some yellow birch bark during a recent field trip to the Waterloo State Recreation Area. The visit was part of the school district's Environmental Education program that has been a staple in the curriculum since 1959. Students in grades kindergarten through six take part.

## Input encouraged in budget sessions

Dear Readers,

I want to thank the many staff, student and community members who took the time during the recent millage election to become more knowledgeable about education funding in our district and in the state.

It is important that everyone stays engaged in the conversation about school funding as we work to address budget issues we face in The Ann Arbor Public Schools over the next few months. I believe that it is also imperative to make sure our voices continue to be heard in Lansing when it comes to providing adequate funding for education in our state.



At this point we are still waiting to hear from Lansing what our actual per pupil funding will be for this current school year. As you recall, AAAPS was looking at a \$525 per pupil loss in funding (approximately \$8.7 million) this year. The state House then put forward a plan to restore \$17 per pupil and half of the 20j funds (which is about \$116 per pupil for AAAPS) that were cut.

If the state Senate approves the House plan we would lose \$292 per pupil in funding (approximately \$4.8 million) for this school year. The governor has said that she will sign the House plan if approved by the Senate. At this point the Senate seems unlikely to support the House plan.

I expect that we will have a better idea of what our funding will be by Friday (Nov. 20) when the full funding provision order is supposed to go into effect.

The next steps in our budget process will take careful and thoughtful planning that will include input from parents, staff and the AAAPS community. We are faced with some difficult, but not insurmountable, challenges and decisions.

We will host a series of meetings in December for staff and in January for parents and the community where we will discuss our financial situation and present options for reducing costs and enhancing revenues. During these meetings we will gather feedback about possible options in order to complete our draft budget plan for 2010-11 in February.

We also need to address the reduction in state funding this school year. Over the coming weeks we will take steps to address the loss in funding for the current fiscal year. Our goal in addressing the loss of funding for this school year is to reduce costs through means that will be least disruptive to our students and educational programs. We will discuss our options for cost reduction this year at a study session with the Board of Education on Dec. 3.

I know that we will continue working together collaboratively to ensure that our students receive an outstanding education despite the challenges we face. I look forward to working with you in the coming months.

*Todd Roberts, Superintendent  
The Ann Arbor Public Schools*

## Staff in the Spotlight: Gary Graff

### Gary Graff

**Occupation:** Technology education teacher at Scarlett Middle School for 34 years. He also taught for 25 years as an adjunct professor at Eastern Michigan University.

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial education from Eastern Michigan University.

**Residence:** Chelsea.

**Age:** 57.

**Family:** Married to Sandi for 35 years. Two sons: Dan and Dave.

**Pets:** A cat Neermy and fond memories of a Labrador retriever named Sunny.

**Hobbies:** Hands-on projects, camping, coaching, baseball and Civil War history. He also enjoys travel, scuba diving and fishing.

**Community service:** Active at the First United Methodist Church in Chelsea and stays involved with student programs and activities at Scarlett Middle School.



Scarlett teacher Gary Graff works with a few of his many students in his technology education classroom.

## Veteran teacher loves Scarlett

By Casey Hans  
AAPS New Service

Gary Graff's 34 years in The Ann Arbor Public Schools can be focused in one place: Scarlett Middle School where he has worked since it opened.

Graff was first offered a temporary job and after a few weeks, he came aboard full-time. "I decided this was the place for me," said Graff, 57, talking recently between first and third hours in his Technology Education classroom. "We are one, big family. It's just kind of a natural fit."

He estimates he has had about 15,000 children attend his classes at Scarlett over his years teaching. He points to a handsaw, "I tell the students, every (student) hand has touched that," he said.

In his early years as a teacher, he taught traditional industrial arts. A program that once encouraged only boys to take what was called "shop" today encourages students with an interest in computer-aided design or engineering to sign up. Graff said his classes are pretty evenly divided between boys and girls today.

"It's a balance between the old and the new," he explained.

He takes the science curriculum and matches his classes to it: Sixth-graders focus on earth sciences, seventh-graders on life sciences and eighth graders on physical sciences.

And the kids seem to embrace it. An extra-curricular Engineering Club recently attracted 27 students to sign up for the after-school session in one recent week.

Ellen Daniel, a teacher at Scarlett and former Ann Arbor school board member, said

her children have enjoyed Graff's classes over the years. "He does so many things so well that it is difficult to know where to begin," she said. "An hour spent with Gary is observation of a Master Teacher at work."

Daniel noted that he is "thoughtful" and reflective" and is always looking for ways to improve in the classroom. "I know that I am a better teacher for having his example and support," she added, noting that Graff was selected as the Scarlett Teacher of the Year last year.

Graff has a definite passion for his profession. "I wanted to be in the classroom. It's my chosen work - I love what I do," he said. And, he credits his chosen teaching area to a great drafting instructor in high school who "taught me it was more than bending metal and busting boards," he said.

He shares his love of education with his wife of 35 years, Sandi, who is a second-grade teacher in Manchester. The two grew up in Saline where they knew each other as youngsters and became high school sweethearts before marrying and raising two sons. In their early years, the family lived in both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti before building a home and settling in Chelsea.

During his years at Scarlett, Graff has been an assistant coach and coordinated the school yearbook for a time. He still attends school events to support the Scarlett kids.

Graff said today's students are better behaved than many in years past. "The school district gets the credit," he said. "Things like the anti-bullying program, they have kids come together and work in teams. The behavior has been much improved."

# Partnership focuses on depression, suicide risks

From AAPSNews Service

A partnership in its third year between The Ann Arbor Public Schools and the University of Michigan Health System is raising awareness of depression and the risk for suicide in children.

More than 350 Ann Arbor staff members have been trained to spot anxiety and depression and keep it from escalating into a problem.

"We're not asking teachers to become mental health professionals. We want them to be able to talk to a student or colleague if they see a problem," explained Trish Meyer, program manager for outreach and education at the U-M Depression Center who also is a parent in The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

The partnership is not funded by public money, but by private donations, Meyer said. Community donations as well as fundraisers and several memorial funds provided seed money for the program.

In two years, most Ann Arbor secondary principals and middle school staff as well as some central office staff have gone through training and, this year, training has begun for high school staff. Ann Arbor schools Administrator for Secondary Education Joyce Hunter stressed that the district intends for the program to be self-sustaining in district.

Most train with SafeTALK (suicide alertness for everyone; Tell, Ask, Listen, Keep Safe), which helps participants challenge attitudes about depression, recognizing when someone is having a problem, engaging them in discussion, listening to them and then connecting them with a trained professional. Some have gone a step further and trained in suicide intervention. Twenty-four Ann

## Depression and Anxiety in Youth and Adolescents

**When:** 7-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 17.

**Where:** Ann Arbor District Library, 343 S. Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor.

**Presenter:** Dr. Kate Fitzgerald, assistant professor, University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry Child and Adolescent Anxiety Program.

**Sponsors:** The U-M Depression Center and with The Ann Arbor District Library.

Arbor school employees have received additional training through ASIST or applied suicide intervention training skills. Of those, 16 can now train other staff members in SafeTALK.



Julieanne Muir

One of those is Northside Elementary School social worker Julieanne Muir, who is a trainer for both SafeTALK and ASIST sessions. She said she became interested as someone who deals with such things professionally and also as someone who has been touched personally. She said today's economic climate is causing even more concern.

"I'm seeing more families and children that are stressed," she said. "And staff are dealing with the same issues."

She said training sessions always show how widespread the problem is. "In every single training there has been a staff member or multiple staff

members who have been impacted by suicide or depression," she said. "It's there. It impacts people at every single (school) level."

Depression is a chronic medical condition that is often misunderstood, Meyer said. The average age where clinical depression and bipolar disorder is first seen is between the ages of 15 and 24; recognizing and managing depression early can help prevent tragedies in schools and elsewhere, she said.

Anne Kramer, a research associate and clinical social worker with the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry also works with the Ann Arbor program and said schools are the logical place to reach young people since they spend so much time there.

She notes that 26 percent of students in their late teens have experienced depression at some point in their lives.

"If left untreated, symptoms can become worse, episodes can be closer together," she said, adding that some can escalate into the suicidal realm.

Kramer said there are a number of coping strategies that can be taught to those with depression including teaching ways to live a healthier lifestyle and other treatments including therapy and medication.

She said anecdotal evidence from school staff show that the partnership between Ann Arbor and U-M is doing its job and raising awareness. "And that's encouraging," she added.

Muir suggests and parents and staff follow their instincts in recognizing a problem. "Trust your judgment that you know and understand your children and students well," she said. Talk with pediatricians and professionals in the schools. "Drawing on those relationships are important."

## Environmental Education, from page 1

know about things around you, you can't take care of it," Szczygiel says, speaking about the importance of the program. "This puts a value on it."

Out in the woods, Szczygiel tells students to tread lightly, watch and listen. After one student discovers a tiny spring peeper under some leaves, he encourages them some more. "There's more than peepers here," he says. "Pay attention to what's in the trees. If you're quiet, you'll hear things."

Fourth grade teacher Shaughn Kalnaraups' class is on this trip. She takes delight in the annual outings. "The trips are in synch with what they're learning in the classroom," she said. "It extends their learning outdoors."

Kate, a fourth-grader in Kalnaraups' class, said her favorite part of the day was when the students jumped up and down in the bog area and

watched the ground move. Classmate Annie said she "learned a lot about the tulip tree. It's now my favorite tree. The leaves are an awkward shape and they're really pretty. It's really massive."

Small groups of students are escorted around the park with Szczygiel and a team of volunteers who play a critical role. Regulars such as Jane Levy, a retired teacher who now is a beekeeper, and Tom Jameson, spend many days each year taking students on hikes. Jameson said he helps with field trips three to four days each week.

Whether it's first-graders learning about winter animals at Kensington Metropark or third-graders studying pond habitats, every student in grades kindergarten through six — about 400 classrooms — get a hands-on environmental lesson during the school year. He takes them to gravel pits, water-treatment facilities and into just about every park

around the area. Fifth-graders get the thrill of a "winter survival" session where they build fires and cook their own hot lunch.

"A lot of people thought it (environmental education) was a fad," he adds. "It's not a fad and it really makes a difference. Every day, students say to me that 'this is the best thing I've ever done.'"

Browning said he thinks environmental education has staying power, because it speaks to everyone. "We live in such a technology age," he said. "The environmental education program is pretty good at helping you understand that, despite the technology, there's a real world out there."

*Casey Hans edits this newsletter for The Ann Arbor Public Schools. Contact her via e-mail at [hansc@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:hansc@aaps.k12.mi.us) or by calling 734-994-2696 ext. 81228*

## School Bells

### 81 honored at dinner

Eighty one Ann Arbor high school students were honored Nov. 7 at the annual Freedom Fund Dinner, sponsored by the Ann Arbor chapter of the NAACP. African-American students who have earned at least a 3.2 grade point average in school are honored. Keynote speaker was Washtenaw County Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton. Honorees included:

#### Community High School:

*First-year scholar* Chelsea Evans-Warren; *second-year scholars* Max Bowen, Emily Milligan, Tamar Parks and Samantha Thomas.

#### Huron High School:

*First-year scholars* Caryle Allen, Christiana Allen-Pipkin, Saniya Bryancé, Aliante Burneli, Blaire Crockett, Tyler Davis, Sharzay Fields, Julian French, LaMecah Hughbanks, Kimmara Lee, Maya Long, Fatou Ndaw, Cynthia Ofili, Chinyere Onime, Lindsey Whitlock, Dallas Williams; *second-year scholars* Brittany Cole, Garuzhirayi Dingwiza, Awah Ditah, Yonica Dupree, Marysa Hill, Jeremy Jackson and Imani Watkins; *third-year scholars* Whitney Foster, Ralph Green, Noelle Kabunguba, Devon Mico and Bre'Anna Simpson.

#### Pioneer High School:

*First-year scholars* Malachi Bowerbank, Jazzmine Cooper, DeLayna Corley, Tobias Kpadonou, Kirby Lee, Asili Marable, Jessica Obadike, Justin Pendleton, Danisha Scott, Kyle Snedecor, Ana Vereen; *second-year scholars* William Anderson, Trisha Arnold, Tiffany Cole, Bradie Connor, Chloe Corley, Dominique Corley, Sabrina Gay, Gregory Goss II, Megan Graham, Mami Herring, Victoria Lloyd, Kaitlen McKay, Kaitlyn Mills, Davonte Powell, Jordan Robertson, Angelica Shipman, Crystal Smith, Willie Smith, Jr., Joshua Weiland and Aaron Wilson; *third-year scholars* Aiyssa Goss, Ugochukwu Uche, Ayona Vanhorn-Lee, Christina Wade, Devin Webster and Brandis Yarrington.

*Skyline High School:* *First-year scholars* Semat Dala, Hadsa Farah, Jeremy Jagers, Kelsy Lee, Jasper Lindsay, Noah Miller, Jonathan Murli, Chame' Rael Whisitt, Ibrahim Saed and Page Wurt.

*Stone High School:* *First-year scholar* Brittany Hayes.

## Images around the schools



### Tappan 6th-graders learn love of language from U-M lineman

David Moosman, starting senior offensive lineman from the University of Michigan football team, visited the sixth-grade team of Victoria Power (pictured with him above), James Cerbeti, Maria Erickson and Patricia Hueter at Tappan Middle School's media center on Nov. 2.

An English major at U-M, Moosman spoke about his love of reading and writing and told students that his mother inspired his field of study. Moosman read Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" for students. "Every year I introduce the Poetry Genre with Robert Frost's poem and connect with the kids in conversation about the "new" road they will be traveling on starting middle school," Power said.



### Pioneer advanced placement students get real life writing experience

In what is normally a literature driven course, Don Packard's Advanced Placement English students at Pioneer High School took a break from "The Scarlett Letter" to visit with Brad Hedeman from Zingerman's online.

Hedeman, who is responsible for the online content for Zingerman's Mail Order business, came to Pioneer Nov. 5 to talk about how he writes and the process he employs when writing about food.

Students were then given a chance to write their own product descriptions of chocolate bacon that is sold at the store and through Zingerman's mail order. The "winning" product description will replace the existing copy on the Zingerman's Web site. Look for it in weeks to come.

Zingerman's Mail Order is part of The Zingerman's Community of Businesses in Ann Arbor. Visit [www.zingermans.com](http://www.zingermans.com).

### Skyline swimmers help in the classroom, raise money for breast cancer research

RIGHT: Members of the Skyline High School Women's Swimming Team spent their day off recently reading to the Young 5s and kindergarten classes at Arbor Elementary. They were welcomed by teachers Sarah Bradley and Carol DeKeyser and their students. The partnership went swimmingly: The students athletes have been invited back after the Young 5s have completed the stories they are now writing.



LEFT: The second Skyline-Pioneer Swim-for-the-Cure took place recently. Each year the athletes spend the week prior to the swim meet learning about breast cancer and sharing their experiences with the disease. This year, the team honored Pioneer High School senior Hannah Maxbauer's mother, Jan Maxbauer, who is being treated for breast cancer. Here, Skyline and Pioneer swimmers mingle during the competition.

photo by Eva Teissou

Heritage Newspapers (heritage.com)

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Life

## Skyline High Presents 'Annie Get Your Gun'

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

By Ellie Falaris Ganelin, Special Writer

The Skyline High School Theatre opened Nov. 13 with a rendition of the Broadway hit "Annie Get Your Gun." Directed by Anne-Marie Roberts, this is the third musical the school has put on since Skyline first opened last fall.

"It's always rewarding to see the kids grow," Roberts said.

"Annie Get Your Gun," by Irving Berlin, tells a fictionalized story of real-life sharpshooter Annie Oakley. The story starts in Cincinnati, where the backwoods Annie, played by Richa Saran, gets roped in to a shooting contest against the great Frank Butler, played by Ari Axelrod, who tours with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. To everyone's surprise, Annie narrowly wins, dazzling the crowd as well as Buffalo Bill (Will Babbitt) and the show's manager, Charlie Davenport (Andrew Nazzaro).

Before she knows it, Buffalo Bill invites Annie to join his show on the road. She's smitten with Frank, and while he reciprocates, he thinks differently when Annie ends up getting a bigger role than him in their traveling shooting act. They end up touring in separate shows for a time, as Annie rises to international stardom.

Roberts noted that one of the challenges of putting on the musical was getting enough boys to fill the male roles. But Roberts found ways to work around it. Some of roles, including hotel owner Foster Wilson, is instead Faustina Wilson (Angie Goulet) in this production. A cowgirl trio (Christiana Hench, Ilana Rashes and Natsumi Shoji) replaces a cowboy trio, accompanying Annie Oakley as she sings her siblings to sleep.

The musical first premiered in 1946 and has since gone through several revivals. In the meantime, the play has become a popular production for high schools across the country. However, aspects of the original musical have become controversial. With the presence of racism against Native Americans and prejudice against women, director Anne-Marie Roberts chose to go with the more toned-down 1999 revision of the musical.

The presence of guns in the story has been the topic of some discussion among some in the blogosphere. The blog "Ann Arbor School Musings" pointed out in August that Michigan has very strict rules about students possessing weapons in the public schools: "What if a kid holds the fake gun up to another kid's head and goes 'bang, bang' just to be funny? Aren't we borrowing trouble here?"

But after seeing the play this weekend, the blogger, who goes by "Ruth," changed her mind.

"'Annie Get Your Gun' has guns, but it's not violent," she said, noting that her initial concerns stemmed from how guns and violence are often intertwined.

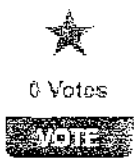
Roberts agrees: "In a public high school, we address violence in a broad sense," she said. "Aside from Annie joking about shooting Dolly Tate, it isn't really a depiction of gun violence."

The play continues 7:30 p.m. Nov. 20 and Nov. 21 at Skyline High School. Tickets are \$25 VIP seating, \$12 general admission and \$8 for students. Tickets are available at the door or at [www.showtix4u.com](http://www.showtix4u.com).

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# Ann Arbor school board Trustee Helen Gates-Bryant resigns

Published: 12:00 PM EDT, 11/17/2016

0 Comments, 0 Comments

Longtime Ann Arbor school board member Helen Gates-Bryant resigned from her position tonight, citing personal and economic reasons.

Her resignation was effective at the end of the meeting.

In offering her resignation, Gates-Bryant said while the remaining trustees face great challenges, they're up to the task of making cuts while preserving Ann Arbor's education quality.

"Because I know this is an awesome board, I know this board is up for the challenge," she said. "I'm encouraging you to stay the course. You're doing the right things."

Board members said during almost seven years on the board, Gates-Bryant championed the voice of those without voices and also helped in the process of building the new Skyline High School.

"I have not one iota of a doubt that the education of students in this district is better because of Helen's work," Trustee Glenn Nelson said.

After receiving a hug and a plaque recognizing her service on the board from board President Deb Mexicotte, Gates-Bryant choked up as she made her final remarks.

"This has really been hard. I have really enjoyed the service I've been able to provide, and I really want to thank the community for giving me the opportunity," she said. "I'm going to truly miss being here at the table."

Gates-Bryant was elected at a time of turmoil in the district and on the board. During her tenure, members worked to unify the school board, hire Superintendent Todd Roberts and administrate a more than \$240 million bond issue that built Skyline and renovated all the district's schools. She has been serving as a committee chair for several years, including the planning committee this school year.


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The school board has 30 days to appoint a replacement. The replacement will serve until the end of the school year. A regular school election will be held in May, and Gates-Bryan's seat will be up for election then.

Those interested in filling the vacancy can send a resume, a letter of interest no longer than two pages and three letters of recommendation by Nov. 30 to the district's headquarters. The candidates will be interviewed in open session with a Dec. 16 date for final vote.

Once a selection is made, the candidate is immediately sworn in and seated at the board table.

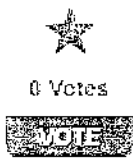
*David Jesse covers K-12 education for AnnArbor.com. He can be reached at davidjesse@annarbor.com or at 734-523-2534.*

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# Ann Arbor school board gets clean financial audit, discusses school finances

By Mike P. Szabo on December 18, 2009

12 Comments [Comment Now](#)

The Ann Arbor Public Schools' Educational Foundation has received about \$7,500 in private donations since voters turned down a countywide school-enrichment millage, executive director Wendy Correll told the school board Wednesday night.

In addition, a private donor has offered matching funds up to \$10,000 for donations gathered from new donors between Nov. 4 and Dec. 31, Correll said.

The hope is those who voted for the unsuccessful millage will donate the money they were willing to pay in taxes to the foundation, which supports the school district.

Correll's announcement was one of several financial items on the agenda for the school board tonight.

The biggest item was the district's audit of its spending for the 2008-09 school year.

The district has a clean audit, Eric Formberg of Plante Moran told the board. That means the auditors found no problems in the handling of the district's finances.

According to the audit, the district received slightly more than \$192 million in revenue for the 2008-09 school year, while it spent about \$186.5 million. The difference, about \$4.1 million, was spent out of the district's fund balance. That lowered the total fund balance to \$27.9 million.

The numbers reported were for the district's general fund.



Wendy Correll

File photo

Several board members had questions about the fund balance. Formberg said only about 10 percent of that fund balance was undesignated. The majority of the fund balance, 52 percent, is set aside to help with cash flow during the months when the district doesn't get state aid checks.

The auditors said 89 percent of the district's general fund spending is on salaries and benefits. They also said for every \$1 spent on salaries, 80 cents went to instruction.

Trustee Randy Friedman asked Superintendent Todd Roberts to make sure the auditors' presentation was put up on the Web site for district residents to view.


Earlier in the evening, a couple parents who were heavily involved in the failed millage campaign told the board they want to make sure the community understands the district's finances.

"I urge the board to redouble efforts to make the districts' finances not only open, but understandable to those who don't understand education," Steve Norton said.

Christine Stead said the district needs to educate its residents about what programs are mandated by the state, what changes they can make, what costs the districts controls and what costs the district does not control.

Roberts told the school board district administrators plan to hold a series of meetings with the public in the coming months over budget cuts. He said the district hopes to have a draft budget for the 2010-11 school year complete by February.

*David Jesse covers K-12 education for AnnArbor.com. He can be reached at [DavidJesse@annarbor.com](mailto:DavidJesse@annarbor.com) or at 734-623-2534.*

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## Terra E. Webster, Logan Elementary School principal

### Bio

**Age:** 44

**Position, for how long:** Elementary principal since January 2006.

**Live in what neighborhood and how long:** Pittsfield Township.

**How would you like to be remembered:** Someone who had a love for learning and a passion for education. Someone who exemplified Christ's love toward mankind.

**Most significant accomplishment:** Becoming an educator.

**Biggest disappointment:** None to date. I've learned from every disappointment, therefore they have become learning opportunities. An educator takes advantage of every teachable moment.

### Ten Questions

**1. What do you do on a home football Saturday?**

Make every effort to attend the game. If I'm not at the game, I unconditionally avoid that part of town.

**2. You're a tour guide in Ann Arbor, where would you take a tourist?**

Oh this one is easy. The first stop would be at Logan Elementary (I'm always bragging about my staff and students). From Logan, we would go to the Big House, although I'd make a point to pass Huron High School, my high school alma mater and the Arb. The peonies at the Arb are simply breathtaking. Once at the Big House, we would abandon our ground transportation and continue the tour on foot. From there, we would meander through U of M campus and end the tour at Washtenaw Dairy, where I'd spring for butter-pecan ice cream.



**3. What's your favorite season in Ann Arbor and what makes it special?**

My favorite season in Ann Arbor is, without a doubt, fall. The beautiful fall colors, trips to the cider mill and, of course, football. Fall is also the time of year that students return to school, which is always a highlight!

**4. What are the pros and cons of living in Ann Arbor?**

Pros: Ethnically diverse culture, education exudes from the very pores of Ann Arbor; a plethora of family-friendly events and activi-

ties, world-class educational system for K-12 and beyond, fairly clean city (those who litter are actually frowned upon), many parks, reliable and efficient police and fire departments (both groups are also active volunteers in our schools), citizens are pretty amicable and public-spirited. My family moved to Ann Arbor in 1975 to facilitate my mother attending U of M's nursing program. Well, we've been here ever since.

Cons: Still looking for them.

**5. Which Ann Arbor restaurant makes your favorite dish, drink or dessert and what is it?**

Impossible to select one favorite restaurant. When I taking guests out to eat, I simply ask them, "What do you feel like eating?" Then I select the restaurant based upon their palate.

**6. What building or landmark in Ann Arbor makes it unique?**

Although the University of Michigan hospital is quite impressive, hats off to the Big House! I have family across the country; they all know the Big House.

**7. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about Ann Arbor, what would it be?**

This wound is still fresh - the State School Aid, specifically restoring the 20j state funding. As everyone is painfully aware, our schools are hemorrhaging financially.

**8. What's your favorite saying or quote?**

"Long after they have forgotten what you taught them, they will remember how you treated them" - author unknown.

**9. If you could give a newcomer to Ann Arbor one piece of advice, what would it be?**

Welcome home!

**10. Ann Arbor is known as tree city, what's your favorite and why?**

I appreciate all the trees in Ann's Arbor.

A Journal

A2Journal: ON THE

# 10 SPOT

The A2 Journal asks 10 questions of people who help shape and move Ann Arbor.



# WASHTENAW COUNTY LEGAL NEWS

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Published: Thursday, November 19, 2009

FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL CALENDAR STATISTICS NOTICES COURTS FORMS CLASSIFIEDS CONTACT US ABOUT US



## Tappan School inaugurates 'Law Club' with presentation by two county homicide detectives

By Frank Werr

### Legal News

Washtenaw County homicide detectives Tom Sinks and John Scafasci visited Tappan School last week for the inaugural meeting of that school's Law Club.

Hosted by long-time Tappan teacher Wendy Raymond, the club is an extension of legal-related activities Raymond has offered "for 20 years," she said.

"Due to changes in class scheduling, some seventh graders were unable to attend my classes as eighth graders so we came up with the idea of a 'law club' this year that allows any student to participate," she said.

The club will meet six times a year on Thursdays. Future programs will feature local attorneys discussing why they chose to enter the law as well as a mock trial to be held in Judge Timothy Connors' courtroom.

Judge Connors has long championed Raymond's work hosting courtroom tours by Raymond's students.

On the right, Sinks shows students how bullets fired from differing distances may or may not leave residue on victims' clothing.

Sinks and Scafasci also showed students how detectives can find fingerprints on various surfaces, even on rubber gloves worn by suspects; how molds of shoe prints are cast; and how to use a Super Glue fuming box to make finger prints readable on certain surfaces.

About 50 students attended the Law Club paying rapt attention and asking pertinent questions during the event.

Published:11/12/09

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# State's funding cuts hit districts

Continued from A1

## The schools

In school board meetings across Washtenaw County since the vote, more details about budget shortfalls are emerging. The deficits aren't the product of the failed millage vote. Instead, they're the outcome of nearly \$300 per student cuts from each school district's state funding over the past month.

Ann Arbor has seen almost double that amount on per student.

Per-pupil state aid is a school district's main source of revenue.

"Based on up-to-date staffing, adjustments in special education reimbursement, declining enrollment and a \$292 per-pupil reduction, we have a \$2 million shortfall for the (current) 2009-2010 school year," Graden wrote.

"And based on a conservative estimates-per-pupil state funding cut of \$300, an expected decline in enrollment (the size difference between the graduating class and a typical incoming kindergarten class), and increases in salaries, health care, energy, etc., we project an additional shortfall of \$3.4 million next year."

That's a combined \$5.4 million deficit in the next 18 months, Graden said, noting as a point of reference that the district's current fund balance is \$3.4 million — 6.5 percent of its \$52 million total budget. Independent auditors recommend a 10 percent to 15 percent fund balance for a district of Saline's size, Graden said.

Graden has scheduled a "Community Conversation" about finances for 6:40 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday night in the Liberty School auditorium.

Saline's school board also voted Tuesday to direct Graden to reopen the district's contract with teachers. Similar conversations will begin soon in all the area's school districts, superintendents said.

## Private citizens

Albert Berriz jokes that the work of running his company, McKinley Inc., is piling up as he has meetings on school financing.

Berriz was one of the key drivers behind the millage defeat. He spent at least \$75,000 of his company's money to

"I've never been unwilling to tax myself if there's a good reason for the tax," he said, pointing to his support of Ann Arbor's gambel millage.

But he says school districts haven't done enough to manage their budgets before asking people for more money in a tough economic time.

Berriz outlined several steps he believes districts should take now:

» Look closely at consolidation to make sure buildings are running efficiently at capacity. He doesn't see a reason buildings should be running 75 percent full. "There's going to be survivors and losers. I do believe that the probability that this county will have a district overheads (including the Washtenaw Intermediate School District) is not high, but the kids don't have to suffer in that. They can still get a good education."

» Competitively bid out support services and health insurance coverage. He said he pays more for health insurance for his company's 1,200 employees than he does in property damage insurance on his properties, a main reason he bids his company's insurance regularly. That generates savings for his company, money he thinks the school districts can also realize.

» Open up Ann Arbor as a schools-of-choice district, drawing in students from around the county. They would increase revenues in Ann Arbor and also work to further diversify schools.

Berriz also said districts should become more transparent about their finances and the moves they intend to make.

"What I'm trying to get (school officials) to understand is that when they are transparent, people trust them," he said. "When they are opaque (as they are now), people's fears that something is wrong are magnified."

He knows his ideas are controversial. And that tough times are likely to continue.

"These topics are all about the center because they don't affect the kids," he said. "The likelihood that you will see a building boom in any (Washtenaw County) township is less than zero. There's going to be no new construction. The value of the existing tax base will continue to decline. Plus, on the sales tax, there's less disposable income now."

Berriz said he also knows

Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman worries that division may already be happening.

"There were two main reasons people voted against the millage," he said. "One is they said, 'I don't want to raise my taxes in tough times.' That's a very honest view that I understand and I sympathize with. While it is painful to see taxes go up, it's even more pain to see education deteriorate. (However) that's a legitimate and fair argument (against the millage)."

The other argument, Friedman said, is the school district is being mismanaged. He said people were misled and didn't understand the district's finances.

"They said there needed to be more transparency. I'm sorry. There's plenty of transparency and transparency doesn't pay teachers," he said. "There have been consistent efforts in this district to pare down our administration."

Friedman said he's afraid the district is on the verge of a return to several years ago, where board meetings were filled with divisiveness and superintendents were regularly run out of town. But he said he hopes it will be the opposite, and the community will come together.

"In the short term, there's going to be cuts that need to be made and how the community responds will be the key. In if we look back in three years and say we did a hell of a job of solving this problem or if we look back and say we fought when we should have thought," Friedman said.

## Reform efforts

Not all the efforts are taking place at the local level.

Several parents, district employees and school board members traveled to Lansing to lobby lawmakers for restoration of funding and health-care reform.

Also, one of the main anti-millage citizen groups has become The Coalition for Responsible Schools for All Students, a political action committee lobbying for education reform.

The group is holding its first public meeting 5-8 p.m. today at the Ann Arbor Community Center, 925 N. Main St.

On the agenda is the latest information on school funding from Lansing, a recap of

# Schools adapt to budget woes

Washtenaw County School officials and school boards are weighing various options to deal with state cuts in their budgets. In one district, officials are participating with a county and potentially moving to a new school district.

Saline isn't the only local school district facing such dilemmas. The Washtenaw County Board of Education is creating a new county-wide funding stream, nearly two weeks after voters narrowly approved a millage vote to enhance current millage that would have raised \$40 million for the district's school district.

Graden wrote in a recent e-mail to district parents, "We have begun the process of assessing the ramifications of our current shortfall and exploring the options for so many of us."

Graden wrote in a recent e-mail to district parents, "We have begun the process of assessing the ramifications of our current shortfall and exploring the options for so many of us."

The stark reality facing the Saline school district, Superintendent Scott Graden says, is the district will become insolvent by the middle of next year if cuts aren't made. That's a fate Graden doesn't want to see.

Look for live coverage Monday night of the Community Conversation in Saline at AnnArbor.com

More online: [www.annarbor.com](http://www.annarbor.com)

11-18-2009



4 Votes



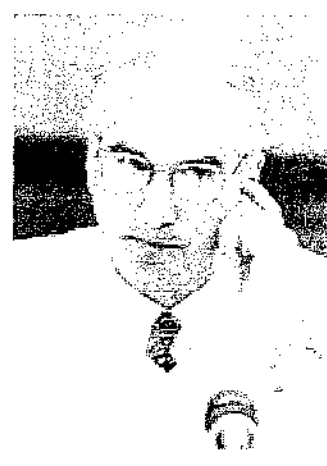
# Ann Arbor school board member Randy Friedman's residency questioned

Posted Tuesday, November 17, 2009

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Just before the start of the school year, Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman bought a 5,600-square-foot house in Birmingham to cut down his commute between Ann Arbor and the Oakland County private school where his children now attend.

Friedman said the purchase shouldn't disqualify him from serving on the school board since he still owns a home in Ann Arbor. And although some have raised questions about his status in the district, it's unclear who, if anyone, would launch an investigation into Friedman's residency.



Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman

Friedman said he asked fellow school board members whether he should resign, and they told him to stay on the board.

"I love Ann Arbor. My home is in Ann Arbor," he said. "I've given a lot of my time and my wife has given a lot of time to help our community. We are not in Birmingham to participate in Birmingham's community life."

School board President **Deb Mexicotte**, who acts as the board's spokeswoman, said she was aware Friedman's children are at the private school. The school board has not discussed Friedman's status in public meetings or taken a position on his decision to buy a home in another district.

Mexicotte wouldn't comment on Friedman's move to enroll his children elsewhere, other than to say that while parents have to make the best choices for their children, the Ann Arbor school district provides a great education with a great teaching staff.

Friedman's eligibility to serve on the board centers on which home he declares as his primary residence.

At the moment, public records show both his homes - in Washtenaw and Oakland counties - are listed as his primary residence.

Friedman said that's a mistake.

"Ann Arbor is my primary residence. I never signed any affidavit declaring (the Birmingham house) as my primary residence," Friedman said, adding his lawyer reviewed documents related to the house purchase after AnnArbor.com questioned him.

Friedman said the attorney couldn't find any documents saying Birmingham was his primary residence.

State law mandates school board trustees be eligible voters in the district in which they serve. People are qualified to vote in the district where they claim their primary residence.

#### **A family tradition**

Friedman has long ties with Detroit Country Day. This is the first full school year all of Friedman's four school-age children have attended the high-achieving private school in Detroit's suburbs, he said.

Friedman graduated from Country Day; his two oldest sons graduated from there, and he served on its school board for 12 years. He also helped start an alumni fundraising campaign for Country Day.

"We've had a member of our family on the board almost 50 years," he said. "This is a huge tradition with my family. My connection to Country Day isn't new news. When I was appointed to the board (in 2002), the head of Country Day wrote me a letter of recommendation."

His youngest 2 children moved to Country Day last spring, joining their sister, who made the jump from Ann Arbor 2 years ago, and their brother, who started there 3 years ago, Friedman said.

Over the summer, Friedman and his wife, Donna, bought the \$1.4 million house in Birmingham.

"We found that the commute between Ann Arbor and Birmingham too hard on (the children)," he said.

**Qualified to serve?**

Randy Friedman said the fact that his children don't attend Ann Arbor schools shouldn't be a factor in his eligibility to serve on the school board. His term runs through 2011.

"I don't have to have my kids in the district to care for education in Ann Arbor," Friedman said. "I don't think there should be some sort of loyalty test (to serving on the board). I say education is the focal point (of the community). I'm certainly a member of the community."

During his board tenure, Friedman has been an advocate of looking at the social climate at the district's high schools and was influential in recruiting Todd Roberts to become superintendent when George Formero left.

Friedman said despite his company's offices being in Livonia, he and his wife are active in sponsoring and attending events in Ann Arbor. Friedman is the CEO of Harvard Drug Group.

Still, he said, "We do have 4 small children. Like a lot of parents of small children, we spent a lot of time with them at home or at their school functions."

Friedman declined to say how many nights a week he and his family are in Birmingham and how many they're in Ann Arbor.

He also pointed out the majority of current school board members don't have children in Ann Arbor's schools. Friedman and Mexicotte are the only current school board members with school-age children. Mexicotte's children attend Ann Arbor schools.

Deb Mexicotte said having children in the district isn't a prerequisite to serving on the school board.

"Certainly many school board members don't have children in district, but serve their constituents well," she said, adding choosing a school is a decision parents make based on a variety of factors.





1 Vote

NOTE

## Ann Arbor school district budget starts to show effects of state aid cuts

Posted 3:20 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2014

7 Comments, Comment here

In many ways, the presentation of the Ann Arbor school district's first quarter financial report was a scene setter for what's to come.

That's because big changes in the revenue the district is getting and the cuts in expenses the district is going to be making won't start showing up until next quarter at the earliest.

The district's finance team spent about a half an hour Tuesday afternoon briefing a school board committee on the district's first-quarter finances.

The full board will be asked its next meeting to amend the budget for this school year to reduce the revenue side by slightly over \$3,000,000 and increase the expense side by \$10,000.

The big chunk of the change on the revenue side is nearly \$2.7 million in lost revenue from a \$165 cut in per-pupil state aid. There's also a \$350,000 cut in investment income. The revenue reduction is just the first of a total of three big negative changes coming to the district's budget.

The other two? A \$233 cut in what's called 20J per-pupil funding from the state and another \$127 per-pupil cut in state aid.

The district hasn't seen any checks yet from the state with the latter two cuts. Those are expected to be seen in the December, Robert Allen, the district's deputy superintendent for operations, said.


There's going to be similar cuts in the expense side once all the cuts are in, school officials said.

District administrators and the school board will gather on Dec. 3 to talk about what those cuts for this school year will be, Superintendent Todd Roberts said.

The \$10,000 increase in expenses this school year is related to professional development expenses, Allen said.

The moves, if adopted by the school board, will make the district's budgeted revenue for the year \$155,940,000 and budgeted expenses of \$191,964,560.

*David Jesse covers K-12 education for Ann Arbor.com. He can be reached at [davidjesse@annarbor.com](mailto:davidjesse@annarbor.com) or at 734-623-2534.*

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Ann Arbor Journal > News

## Longtime school board member steps down

Friday, November 20, 2009

By Lisa Allmendinger, A2 Journal

Longtime Ann Arbor Board of Education member Helen Gates-Bryant resigned from the Ann Arbor Board of Education Nov. 18.

"It is with great regret that I will resign immediately following this meeting," she said.

Citing personal reasons that prompted a move to another state, Gates-Bryant was presented a plaque for her years of service and heard numerous tributes from her fellow board members following her announcement.

She was first elected to the board in 2003.

"We've been working together since 2003 and you brought insight to this table," said board member Glenn Nelson.

Nelson said Gates-Bryant always directed her decision toward the well-being of the district's students.

He recalled driving to Michigan Association of School Board meetings with Gates-Bryant that were filled with her unique sense of humor.

"You're nice and fun, too," Nelson said. "Going to the MASB meetings won't be the same without you."

The outgoing members urged her fellow board members to "stay the course."

Gates-Bryant's open seat will be filled by appointment by the Board of Education Dec. 16.

"I will miss Helen terribly," said board member Randy Friedman. "We've benefited from her contribution and we'll feel an emptiness without her."

Susan Baskett, who ran with Gates-Bryant, and Board President Deb Mexicott, noted that they celebrated their first election together and said they were especially sad she would be the first one leaving.

"I'm a lucky person to have known you," said Board Vice President Irene Patalan.

"You've enriched me and the students are lucky to have had you," she said. "You were always there for those students who needed a voice."

Superintendent of Schools Todd Roberts said, "During the 3 1/2 years of working together, you asked the tough

questions, but you always knew what was fair and right."

Mexicott recalled her campaign for the board with Gates Bryant saying, "The three of us ran together in 2003 and we came on at a time when it was very, very difficult."

Calling Gates-Bryant "a model," Mexicott said she had learned a lot from her departing board member and friend.

"You caused me to reflect on how uniformed a board we've been," Mexicott said.

The board agreed that "the loss to the community is great, but the East Coast is getting someone special."

Gates-Bryant plans to move to Springfield, Mass.

"This is really, really hard," Gates-Bryant said. "You have become my friends on a professional and a personal level and I will truly, truly miss you."

**Lisa Allmendinger can be reached at 1-877-995-NEWS (6397) or at [lallmendinger@heritage.com](mailto:lallmendinger@heritage.com).**

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## Pioneer field hockey coach Jane Nixon, Michigan coach Marcia Pankratz in hospital after scooter accident

Posted: 12:38 p.m. November 20, 2009

13 Comments. Comment Now

**Jane Nixon**, a special education teacher and field hockey coach at Pioneer High School, is in stable condition in the intensive care unit at the **University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center** after suffering injuries Wednesday in a scooter accident in Ann Arbor.

Nixon was riding on a scooter driven by Michigan field hockey coach **Marcia Pankratz** about 8 p.m. Wednesday when they collided with a Dodge Intrepid at the intersection of Packard Street and East University, according to Ann Arbor police. Both Nixon and Pankratz were wearing helmets. Police said the accident remains under investigation.

Pankratz also was admitted to UM Hospital.

A page for Nixon on the Michigan Health System CarePages has a note from John and Joan Nixon and includes, "The family appreciates your support and prayers and asks that you please give them their privacy. Please no visitors at this time."

Nixon has coached at Pioneer for the past 12 seasons, and the Pioneers defeated Huron for a state championship on Oct. 31 - the programs 21st overall and fifth straight. Nixon played college field hockey at Michigan, earning second team All-Big Ten honors in 1986.



Pioneer High School field hockey coach and teacher Jane Nixon. (Photo: File photo)

Pankratz is credited with turning Michigan field hockey into one of the elite programs in the country.

She returned to lead the team in January after a hiatus from coaching. She was previously the head coach of the Wolverines from 1996 to 2004, winning a 2001 NCAA title - the first by a women's team in the history of Michigan athletics.

Before coaching at Michigan, Pankratz played for the U.S. National team at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. She spent nine years with U.S. Field Hockey team (1985-90, 1994-96), playing in 110 international matches.

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**13 Comments:**

Wishing them both a speedy recovery-



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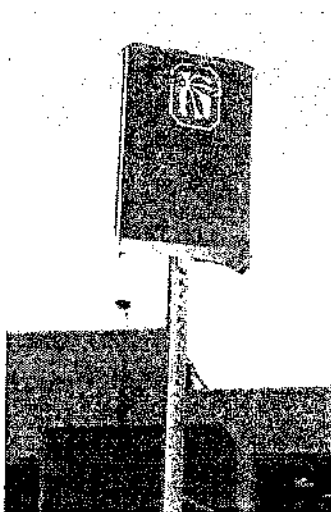
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ADVENTURES IN MULTICULTURAL LIVING

Ann Arbor's Ultimate Cultural Divide: University of Michigan vs Ohio State

Posted 4:21 pm November 20, 2009

Updated 11:01 am 11/20/09



Typical sign for a State-designated University parking lot

There are many types of cultural differences—race, ethnic, gender, sexual preference, religious, socio-economic, education, class—and many types of minorities struggling to have their voices heard, but there is no cultural divide in Ann Arbor so marked as that fueled by the University of Michigan vs Ohio State rivalry.

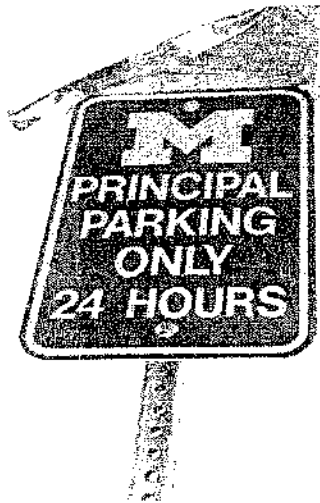
Upon arriving at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School this morning, Principal Kevin Karr was dismayed to discover this act of disrespect/sabotage in the school parking lot, which prompted a blog post in which he writes:

"Today when I arrived at King School, I was greeted with the following in the parking lot. When this type of thing happens at school, it's obviously VERY concerning—and it quickly sets in motion an investigation to find out who is responsible. Putting up Ohio State University signs in or around school is NEVER acceptable!"

This stern warning is followed by a very funny and light-hearted investigation of possible perpetrators and a poll asking King School families to vote on who they think the most likely culprit is.

A gust of wind reveals that the Principal's parking spot is usually designated with a big University of Michigan block M. Is that standard for Ann Arbor Public Schools?

Francis Kai-Hwa Wang is a second-generation Chinese American from California who now divides her time between Ann Arbor and the Big Island of Hawaii. She is editor of MADiversity.com, Asian American Voyage, lead multicultural contributor for American.com, and a contributor for New America Media's Eunoia blog. She is a popular speaker on Asian Pacific American and multicultural issues. Check out her website at franciskaihwawang.org, read her blog at franciskaihwawang.blogspot.com, and she can be reached at franciskai@comcast.net.



Typical sign for a school principal's parking spot

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11/15: Learning from the nuances of tea

1 Comment:

I never saw such blatant pro-U of M signs in any parking lots but I have to say that our daughter went through the top notch AZ school system and, by the age of 10, had decided she would attend the University of Michigan. She did just that - started by walking to her first class at U of M while still a senior at Community High. I think there was "some influence" from k-12 and I see nothing wrong with the 'prep' level promoting the college level - especially when it's the MOST RECOGNIZED college in the country - according to USA Today and other sources.

U of M has a huge impact on our kids. few cities have a great university aiding and reaching out to their kids. Encouraging them to think "Leaders and Best" about themselves is nothing to sneeze at, is it? So - I turn a blind eye to this princely little affectation. We need more like him.

As for the OSU prank sign: If we didn't have OSU to be our Goliath to our David, we'd probably be less ourselves. Now, let's have some enterprising U of M prankster go down to Columbus and put up a big "Reserved for Wolverines" banner across the goal posts at the Horseshoe.



11/15/2015

Posted 1 day ago

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Opinion

## Home Front: Book fairs, mom fueled passion for reading

Friday, November 20, 2009

By Lisa Allmendinger, Heritage Newspapers

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Sometimes while out on assignment, I'm transported back to a previous life.

Not in a mystical or talks-with-spirits kind of way, rather in an "I remember-doing this when I was a kid kind of way."

Last week, I was taken back to elementary school.

For some of you, that might mean a one-room schoolhouse.

Although I'm too young to personally have lived through that period of time, I've read about it.

And I've retold people's stories describing what it was like to learn in a classroom heated by a wood stove, or have a pigtail dipped in an inkwell.

On the other hand, there's nothing like having lived through an event and then writing about it years later.

Such was the case recently when I walked into Logan Elementary School. As I entered the school to cover another assignment, I spied the Scholastic Book Fair and was instantly reminded of my favorite time during my early school days.

Some personal history is needed here. My mom was a kindergarten teacher and a voracious reader. I not only learned to read at a very early age, but also I lived in a home filled with books.

So when my school book fair rolled around each year, I was truly a kid in a literary candy shop. My book choices, like those of my classmates, were placed in separate piles awaiting our parents' arrival.

My pile towered over all the other kids. And I couldn't wait until the end of the school day when my mom would arrive so she could pay for them, and I could start reading.

I distinctly remember her writing checks for more than \$100, which was a huge amount back in the early '60s.

Yup, I was one of the lucky kids. My mom would pay for all those books, and I would grab one and start reading it to her as we drove home.

I'd pick a "skinny" one, which I knew I could read from cover to cover before we arrived at the garage door.

My mom and I would read many of those books together, sometimes acting out the stories. Other times, we'd turn them into art projects.

So fast week, when I saw the excitement of those Logan students turned loose to peruse hundreds and hundreds of books, I was transported back to those amazing days of my childhood -- and a time when someone else paid for the books.

The authors and titles have changed over the years, but the looks on those inquisitive little faces was a mirror image of mine at their age.

Those book shelves were, and still are, my oysters.

Each night, after I've written my newspaper stories for the day, I turn to the stories of other writers.

I'm immediately whisked into their worlds, where I reside until my eyes begin to close and I drift off to sleep.

After attending that book fair, I plan to pick up one of the books I loved as a child and read it out loud to my dogs.

Then I'm going to turn the story into an art project, and put the finished project on my refrigerator -- just like my mom did when I was in elementary school.

Although she died when I was just 15 years old, I'm sure she'll appreciate my grown-up efforts, which were ignited by her love of reading and fueled by those annual Scholastic book fairs.

**Lisa Allmendinger can be reached at 1-877-995-NEWS (6397) or at [lallmendinger@heritage.com](mailto:lallmendinger@heritage.com).**

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Life

## Logan students raise \$1,500 for Food Gatherers

Friday, November 20, 2009

By Lisa Allmendinger, A2 Journalist

Students at Logan Elementary School raised more than \$1,500 during a two-week United Way coin drive project.

The money will be donated to Food Gatherers.

At an assembly Nov. 16, it was announced that the coin drive raised \$1539.97.

The upper elementary classes won the battle of the upper elementary students vs. the lower elementary students for raising the most money, said Hyeon Park, a fifth-grade teacher.

"But we decided that the top earners from each level should be winners," he said.

So, Amy Webster's fifth grade class and Karen Rochell's second-grade class will receive pizza parties for their efforts.

Webster's fifth-grade class contributed \$210.

Included in her class are Islam Ashour, Jessica Baker, Nicholas Boyd, Jesse Cheng, August DiGiovine, Walayah Gaza", Seungwon Hur, Danyahl Hussain, Obinna Ilozor, Leah Knox, Natalie Lakin, Devak Nanua, Isabel Nowak, Arie Park, Conor Smith, Jack Smith, Rebekah Song, Hannah Spirt-Jones and Huda Warsame.

In the lower elementary, Rochell's class contributed \$91.

Included in her class are Nikhila Anand, Maxwell Barry, Nicholas and Noah Boucher, Yuanqi Deng, Yousif and Zacharia Gazali, Chioma Ai Ilozor, Hajar Jaradat, Nicholas Kaipainen, Melissa Lin, Daniel McNeil IV, Aoun Mehdi, Ismail Mohamad, Vedha Reddy, Aisha Said, Sahil Shah, Ryan Watson, Alan and Derek Zhu.

Park also said that the TCF Bank at the corner of Plymouth and Nixon roads allowed Logan staff access to its coin machine and issued a cashier's check at no charge, so all funds collected were donated to the cause.

Lisa Allmendinger can be reached at 1-877-995-NEWS (6397) or at [lallmendinger@heritage.com](mailto:lallmendinger@heritage.com).

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Ann Arbor Journal > News

## Applicants sought to fill school board post

Friday, November 20, 2009

By Lisa Alimendinger, A2 Journal

The Ann Arbor Board of Education is seeking applicants to fill a seat recently vacated by Helen Gates-Bryant.

Those interested must be a citizen of the United States and 18 years of age or older.

Eligible applicants must be residents of the Ann Arbor Public School District for at least 30 days and be eligible to vote.

All those interested in submitting their name for the seat should send a written application to Amy Osinski, Ann Arbor Board of Education, 2555 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 by 4 p.m. Nov. 30.

They can also be faxed to 994-2414 or e-mailed to [osinski@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:osinski@aaps.k12.mi.us).

Application must include a resume that includes the applicant's home address, telephone and, if applicable, e-mail address.

Also include a letter of intent no longer than two pages that details experiences and qualifications applicants would bring to the board.

Applicants will be interviewed by members of the Board of Education Dec. 8, and they will be required to make a brief public statement at the Dec. 16 Board of Education meeting.

Both meetings are held 7 p.m. at the Ann Arbor District Library.

A candidate will be selected and seated Dec. 16, by a majority vote of the board.

The appointment runs through June 30, 2010.

In addition, "We invite the community to submit possible questions to be used in the interview process," Osinski said in a press release from the district.

Questions must be submitted to [osinski@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:osinski@aaps.k12.mi.us) or mailed to 2555 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 by 4 p.m. Nov. 30.

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4 Votes

VOTE

GUEST COLUMN - TOM WATKINS

## Change or die: Michigan's education system is failing students and taxpayers

Submitted by Tom Watkins on 04/11/2011

41 Comments | 607 Views

When I was a boy, I learned you had to pull up the anchor if you wanted to set sail. It seems many in Lansing never learned this lesson.

The foundation on which our schools have been built has disappeared. Raising taxes to perpetuate the failed status quo is insanity. It is the equivalent of trying to set sail without pulling up anchor.

Today's economic crisis should provide the impetus to innovate and change.

### Let's get radical

If we are to thrive and not merely survive in this century, we must be willing to ask: what of the impossible isn't?

How radical should we be? Here are a few examples:

- **Eliminate the senior year of high school.** For far too many of our students, the 12th grade has become nothing more than state subsidized dating. Our children clearly have matured at a faster pace, and technological advances have accelerated learning and knowledge exponentially. With the state investing more than a billion dollars per grade in K-12 education, these are resources that could be redirected to our community colleges and universities with a far better outcome for the individual and state.
- **Where is it ordained that a college degree must take 4 years of study?** Could the same amount of knowledge be acquired in 3 years? Sliding a year off an undergraduate degree would save students time and money and can be done without sacrificing quality. Such noted universities as Cambridge and Oxford offer 3-year degrees.

• **Maximize technology and limited resources** in our system of higher education by making the equivalent of one year of the basic freshman or sophomore instruction be offered via e-learning. The courses would be taught by specially certified e-learning instructors hence reducing the need to expand campus infrastructure and personnel cost.

\* **Pretend the beautiful peninsulas called Michigan were just discovered** with 1.7 million K-12 school-age children and over \$12 billion dollars to educate them to world-class standards. Would any thinking person create the system that currently exists? Take action to consolidate school districts in ways to maximize the redirection of resources to the classroom.

• **Use market forces to steer students to high-demand fields such as math, science and technology.** All education is valuable - some education is more valuable than other education. Currently, we are producing more college grads in fields in low or virtually no demand while high-demand fields cannot find native born students to fill available jobs. The taxpayers of Michigan are subsidizing this inefficiency. Suggest those that majors in high demand fields have their tuition cut in half while those majoring in low-demand fields pay one and one-half the going tuition rate.

### **Change or die**

Clearly, these are unorthodox ideas that under scrutiny, may or may not be solid policy prescriptions for what ails Michigan. However, I do know that our current course is as unwise and unstable as it is unsustainable.

Perpetuating the status quo will not make us competitive in a 21st century, innovation- and knowledge-based economy where ideas and work can and do move around the globe effortlessly. As Michigan flounders, other states and nations are moving forward.

Real change in Michigan is going to require - real change. It is time we lift anchor and boldly set sail for the future.

*Tom Watkins is an education and business consultant in the United States and China. He was Michigan state superintendent of schools from 2001-2005 and mental health director from 1986-1990. He can be reached at [tomwatkins@cof.com](mailto:tomwatkins@cof.com).*





0 Votes

VOTE

## City records: Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman doesn't have principal residence exemption in Birmingham

Posted Tuesday, 04/08/2010 at 11:53 a.m.

9 Comments | 0 Comments | 0 Likes

Tax records on file with the city of Birmingham show Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman did not file for a primary residential property exemption when he bought a house in the Oakland County city earlier this year.

The records, sent to AnnArbor.com from Friedman's attorney this afternoon, show the previous owner filed a form revoking the primary residence exemption after selling the house.

Additional records, also sent to AnnArbor.com by Friedman's attorney, indicate the property is currently listed without a primary residential tax exemption.

The issue came to light Wednesday when [AnnArbor.com reported](#) Friedman purchased a home in Birmingham and was sending his four school-age children to Detroit Country Day school. Friedman also owns a home in Ann Arbor and said that's his primary residence.

"Mr. Friedman and his wife closed on the purchase of the Birmingham home on July 30, 2009," Stephen E. Glazek with Barris, Sott, Denn & Driker, wrote in a letter to AnnArbor.com. "On Aug. 4, 2009, the seller of the Birmingham home filed a 'Request to Rescind Homeowners Principal Residence Exemption,' a copy of which is attached. Mr. Friedman and his wife did not file a new PRE and for the year 2010 there is no PRE (Principal Residence Exemption Affidavit) exemption.



Ann Arbor school board Treasurer Randy Friedman

"This is demonstrated by the attached Birmingham City assessor's office record, which shows the exemption being rescinded on August 5, 2009 and shows that for the year 2010, the PRE exemption is '0.'

Birmingham city officials confirmed today the records are accurate.

However, in calls last week, an employee in the Birmingham assessor's office directed AnnArbor.com to search Oakland County's land property Web site for the land records and said those records were accurate.

Those listings said the personal exemption was in place for the property owned by Friedman.


Glazek addressed that in his letter.

"If a PRE is filed on or before May 1st in the year of the claim, the exemption is valid until December 31 of the year in which the property is transferred. In other words, the property will maintain its homestead exemption through December 31."

Friedman bought the house to cut down on the commute between Ann Arbor and the Oakland County private school where all his school-age children now attend.

Friedman has declined to say how many nights a week he spends at his Birmingham house.

*David Jesse covers K-12 education for AnnArbor.com. He can be reached at davidjesse@annarbor.com or 734-623-2534.*

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Margaret Punch - Burns Park Players

## BURNS PARK: Tappan Middle School graduate Bosco (the cat) laid to rest

Posted: 3:50 p.m. November 23, 2009

[1 Comment](#) [Comment Now](#)

Bosco the cat, a handsome Russian Blue known to the majority of the Burns Park neighborhood, as well as Tappan Middle schoolers and staff, was laid to rest on Wednesday, November 18, 2009. He had suffered from a fibro sarcoma. He was 13 years old.

Bosco started his life on the streets of Flint, MI where he was found on the corner of Atherton and Saginaw streets and brought to the Genesee County Humane Society. Doors were opened to him in a way he would come to expect, as his good looks and personality allowed him to adopt the McHugh family after spending less than 24 hours in the shelter.



Bosco the cat in an undated photo taken by David Felbeck, supplied by Alicia McHugh

According to his owner, Alicia McHugh, Bosco was known to have "boundary issues" and invited himself into the homes of many Burns Park neighborhood families. Whether it be while they were getting the morning paper or by using the pet door, Bosco made himself at home. Probably the most social cat on record, his accomplishments include, lying on the teacher's desk during science class, being dropped off at his door by a school bus, receiving a proper diploma from Tappan Middle School and walking across the stage, as if on cue, during a Burns Park Players musical. His adventures include, having to find someone to call his "owners" to pick him up in Kerrytown. How he arrived in Kerrytown, he never disclosed. Also, he nearly caused an accident on Washtenaw Avenue when he

awoke from his nap in the back of a garaged convertible to find the car moving down the road. In response, he hopped into the front seat startling the driver.

Gary Court was the principal at Tappan Middle School when Bosco was a regular attendee. He relates, "I loved Bosco. He had a gregarious personality. Bosco charmed the hearts of many Tappan students and staff." Mr. Court also pointed out, however, that Bosco often drooled when he was petted and that drool stained his pants on many occasions. As for the infamous graduation, Mr. Court describes Bosco as sauntering across the stage then stopping mid walk for a good petting. From his description, the audience met the announcement of Bosco's honorary graduation and diploma with gales of laughter and Bosco seemed quite pleased with himself.

Susan Pearlman a long time Burns Park Players costumer remembers having to chase Bosco out of the costume room before closing up at the end of the night. He must have loved the cozy feel of all that clothing. Her favorite Bosco moment was during a performance of My Fair Lady, when Clinch Steward was singing, "On the street where I live." She remembers Bosco heading up on stage, "as if on cue," sitting by a lightpole and then exiting down the stage stairs. That night's audience was certain that Bosco was a trained cat.

Bosco will be missed by Alicia, Dan, Emma and Jas McHugh, as well as his other "owners", Jerry Mack of Washtenaw Ave. and Inka and David Felbeck of Scottwood St. The Felbeck's met his needs with unwavering compassion during his final days.

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1/23/09



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# Gov. Jennifer Granholm: Freeze on tax credit considered to save Promise scholarships

Posted on 1/23/09 at 10:00 am

5 Comments | [Get notified](#)



Gov. Jennifer Granholm and students from Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan rallied for support of the Michigan Promise scholarship today.

Tom Perkins | [For AnnArbor.com](#)

A freeze on an income tax credit that helps struggling families is being considered to save the merit-based Michigan Promise scholarship program.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm offered up the solution at a press conference today following a rally with students at Eastern Michigan University to drum up support for restoring the popular scholarship program.

The Michigan Promise program had provided up to \$4,000 to in-state students in merit-based aid before it was cut out of the state budget Oct. 30 to save \$140 million.

To save it, the state may freeze the EITC, a refundable federal tax credit that "helps working people achieve economic stability and security," according to the Michigan.gov Web site.

"That's a freeze on a scheduled tax cut, not an increase," she said.

Granholtz did not offer additional details, including how that would impact those who qualify for the EITC. A spokesperson for the state Department of Treasury was not available for comment this morning.

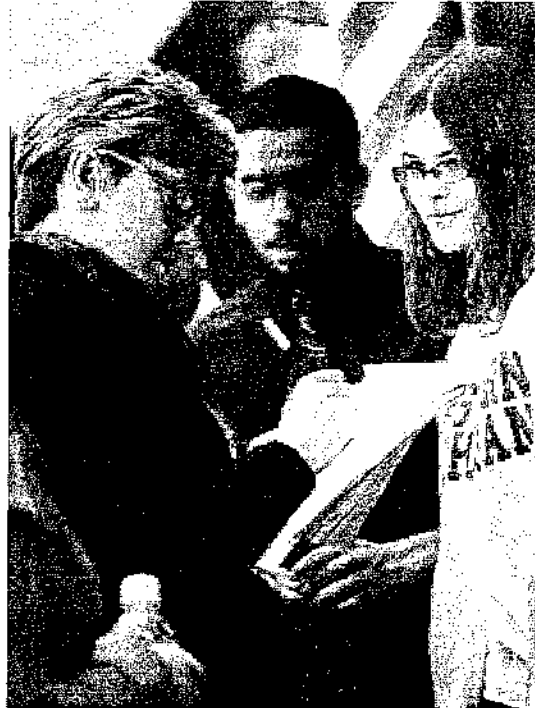
At the rally, Granholtz told an audience of about 140 from EMU, U-M and Washtenaw Community College that the extra tuition help will boost college access. She said the resulting graduates will help remake the state's economy, which is reeling from the loss of auto industry jobs.

At the rally, she told students to make their voices heard.

"It's not too late to save the Michigan Promise, and I'm really here to ask for your help," Granholtz said. "This promise should be kept, but we can't do it alone."

The stop was part of a tour of state colleges Granholtz began last week to drum up support for the scholarship program.

EMU student leaders who addressed the audience before Granholtz's speech encouraged their peers to vote and contact state Senators. The Senate cut the program out of the higher education budget bill Granholtz signed.




Gov. Jennifer Granholm signs autographs for EMU students Emily Gillingham and Antonio Casme following the rally.

Tom Perkins | For AnnArbor.com

Four out of five students who spoke about the personal impact of the loss of the Promise Scholarship were low-income students paying their way through school. But only 300 of 2,400 EMU students who were due to receive Promise cash before the program was cut qualify for the federal, need-based Pell Grant, officials said.

Granholtz also addressed "brain drain," the habit of Michigan college students to leave the state after graduating from college. She said progress is being made toward developing new sectors - like film, tourism, homeland security and alternative energy - to retain more college graduates.

*Juliana Keeping covers higher education for AnnArbor.com. Reach her at [julianakeeping@annarbor.com](mailto:julianakeeping@annarbor.com) or 734-623-2528. Follow Juliana Keeping on Twitter*

 Share this post • [Tags: Eastern Michigan University, Gov Jennifer Granholm, Juliana Keeping](#)

A.A. Com

11/23/09

# Skyline's 'Annie Get Your Gun' impressive

*This is part of a new series of theater reviews of local high school productions, written by local high school students, that will appear on AnnArbor.com. This week, Greenhills School student Katherine Krauss (see bio and more about this program at end of story) reviews Skyline High School's just-concluded production of "Annie Get Your Gun."*

BY KATHERINE KRAUSS  
For AnnArbor.com

Since the time of Irving Berlin and Rodgers and Hammerstein, the musical has seen 60-odd years of evolution and development. In fact, by today's standards, Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun" is simplistic in its plot.

Set in the late 1800s, it tells the story of down-South hillbilly Annie Oakley, who becomes a superstar overnight after she is picked up by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show for her talent as a marksman. This does not please her egotistical partner and occasional love interest Frank Butler, who is not willing to share his spotlight with a woman. He soon leaves Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and defects to a competitor, Tawny Bill's Show.

His prima donna assistant, Dolly, follows him to keep her sister Winnie from marrying a half-Native American boy, Tommy. Eventually, after both shows find glory overseas and at home, they merge, and the two star-crossed couples reunite.

Despite the unadorned plotline, the Skyline Theatre did a notable job with their performance, bringing life and vigor to a cast of characters that would have otherwise been archetypal. Although the entire cast performed

well, I was especially impressed by the work done by sophomore Richa Saran, who played Annie Oakley. Saran played Annie as she was meant to be played on the professional stage and could have easily brought the show singlehandedly to success. Not only did she have a good voice and a maturity while acting that was beyond her years, but she also cut a very dramatic figure while singing in the spotlight.

The lighting of the show was also artistically rendered. The use of the spotlight during the solos in the musical numbers was the only distinct change of lighting throughout the performance. This gave the musical an appropriate, circus-like ambience. The soft yellow lights that illuminated the stage for the remainder of the show did a good job of capturing the period in which the play was set.

The set also aided in establishing a turn-of-the-century circus feel, with a red and white striped backdrop, and elaborate set pieces that rolled on and off. In sum, the majority of technological work behind the production was very effective because it was suited to the period.

The only element that did not agree with the period were the costumes of the socialite girls swooning over Frank Butler. Some were wearing black strapless dresses. Black during that period was worn only by women in mourning or by the Parisian models of highest fashion, and strapless dresses are as modern as the 1990s. However, I found all the other costumes to be historically accurate and quite appropriate.

The final touches to this immense ensemble were the pit orchestra and the choreography. The pit orchestra,

in particular the brass section, was exquisite and passionate about the music they were playing; sometimes so fervent that they played over Ari Axelrod's (playing Frank Butler) and the chorus' vocals in the first act.

The choreography was done well but could have been bigger in some places. (The first half of Saran's number, "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun," comes to mind.) But like everything in this musical, these elements were very professional and remarkable.

Overall, from start to finish, a level of believability and energy was maintained from all characters, enough to transport anyone back to the days of the American Wild West. I recommend this show to anyone with a taste for upbeat romantic westerns, or just a love of Irving Berlin's 1940s swing. You will be in for a beautiful blend of music, choreography, and acting: truly an impressive ensemble performance by Skyline Theatre.

*Guest reviewer Katherine Krauss is a Greenhills School sophomore. She has performed in numerous plays and musicals, her favorite being "The Crucible," and has been a member of her school's competitive public speaking team for four years.*

*The aim of AnnArbor.com's student-review program is to recognize, and provide more coverage for, the accomplished theatrical work that's happening in our schools while also providing opportunities for student writers with an interest in arts criticism. To encourage objectivity, our student writers will always review shows from schools other than their own. To learn more about the student-review program, contact Jenn McKee at [jennmckee@annarbor.com](mailto:jennmckee@annarbor.com) or 734-623-2546.*

**To create districts that can flexibly streamline during financial crises, we must start with open and honest conversations about where dollars are being spent, and why. That conversation is difficult and requires a great deal of political will, which, in our case, the superintendent and school board had.**

Commentary

## Without a Penny More

By Ron Steiger

Before the federal government divvies out the remaining billions of stimulus dollars for education, it wants America's school districts to prove that they can do more with less. This may seem a steep goal, with state and municipal budgets around the country effectively decimated. But even with cutbacks in the past year, our district, the Miami-Dade County public schools in Florida, has been able to free up millions of central-office dollars and reallocate them to the classroom. Others can as well.

Two factors have been dominant drivers of school district finances nationally: student enrollment and property taxes. Earlier this decade enrollment in most large districts decreased substantially. At the same time, local property tax collections soared, as did property values. Although the net effect of these opposing forces varied by district and state, there was one theme common to all: The real estate bubble's expansion mitigated the financial hit that districts would otherwise have taken because of the loss of students.

In an echo of the earlier Silicon Valley experience, however, the bubble eventually popped. The widespread fall-out of the real estate market's collapse handed us the "Great Recession" and meant an unprecedented financial squeeze on school districts.

As a school administrator, I am expected at this point in the story to cry how little funding we receive. Yes, in a state like Florida, with one of the lowest per-pupil expenditure rates in the country, we must continue to aggressively seek an increase in the investment made toward our children's education. Even so, there are important steps that districts can take to effectively squeeze more out of a ruble—to free up millions of existing yet misallocated dollars and redirect them to teaching and learning.

A former business consultant, I joined the Miami-Dade County schools in 2005 through the Broad Residency in Urban Education, a program that places private-sector managers with M.B.A.s and other advanced degrees, as well as experience in helping organizations run efficiently, into public school systems.

In the past year, like many other district managers nationwide, my colleagues and I have had to solve chronic problems with far fewer resources. Miami-Dade's total district budget shrank from \$3.9 billion to \$4.8 billion over the past two years. We ended the 2007-08 school year a mere \$5 million, just a fraction of a percent, in the black.

A century of organizational growth had left the district with some procedures that, though sensible at one time, had become unnecessary over the years. For example, the district had developed a poor process for getting employees off the payroll when their positions were no longer funded, because in the past there had always been other funded positions they could fill. When enrollment declined, this was no longer the case. Such inefficiencies pushed us to the brink of financial insolvency.

Last year, a new superintendent, Alberto M. Carvalho, sat down with selected staff members and had a very frank conversation. For our students to receive a world-class education, he said, we had to first get our financial house in order. That meant significant changes in how the district was structured and how it operated. But most importantly, it meant throwing out old assumptions and moving ahead with openness and simple common sense.

Once we agreed to be fundamentally transparent across departments and to look realistically at our structure and processes, we brought in highly respected chief financial officers and business leaders from around the state to examine our budget. Before long, we began to uncover numerous central-office redundancies and untapped ways to use dollars more flexibly.

We overhauled our organizational charts and moved the vast majority of central-office staff members serving in duplicative roles to the classroom. We benchmarked ourselves against other large districts, and made changes that saved millions on transportation, food service, and school administration. We drastically cut overtime and nonessential spending on supplies.

By being honest about the redundancy within our organization, we were able to shrink our central office by more than 25 percent and cut some 400 top-heavy positions. Then, by relocating these staff members to the classroom, we were able to save jobs, bolster direct support for the students, and reduce class size. In effect, we increased classroom resources without spending more money.

Although the state cut our budget by \$50 million at midyear, we were able to increase our contingency reserve more than tenfold during the worst economic conditions in decades.

We have not been immune from having to make difficult budgetary decisions. But the smallest cuts made have been to direct classroom instruction. And though our financial challenges are far from over, in this recession our district is in its strongest financial position in a decade.

It is a common misperception—and one I used to share—that American school districts are plagued by rampant financial inefficiencies and are wasteful with money with simple financial controls. While this is true in some districts, it is also true to some degree in the private sector. The budgets with which the education sector struggles are complex, to be sure. But, most often, it is a district's very structure and outdated controls that make the school bureaucracy difficult to navigate, whether we are parents, business partners, or even employees.

**To create districts that can flexibly streamline during financial crises, we must start with open and honest conversations about where dollars are being spent, and why. That conversation is difficult and requires a great deal of political will, which, in our case, the superintendent and school board had.**

decimate, but even with that success, we need to free up millions of central office dollars and reallocate them to the classroom.

Two factors have led to dramatic drivers of school district finances nationally: student enrollment and property taxes. Early in this decade, enrollment in most large districts decreased substantially. At the same time, local property tax collections soared, as did property values. Although the net effect of these opposing forces varied by district and state, there was one theme common to all: The net effect probably expanded the financial hit that districts would otherwise have taken because of the loss of students.

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**To create districts that can flexibly streamline during financial crises, we must start with open and honest conversations about where dollars are being spent, and why. That conversation is difficult and requires a great deal of political will, which, in our case, the superintendent and school board had.**

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has indicated that school districts that spend their resources wisely will be more likely to tap in to additional federal stimulus dollars. If that is the case, it would behoove districts to stop allocating resources for short-term goals and instead spend existing dollars in a manner that best serves students and teachers directly. The districts then will be better positioned to save teachers' jobs and develop students' minds. And best of all, it won't cost a penny.

*Ron Steiger is the assistant chief budget officer for the Miami-Dade County school system in Miami and a lover of Michigan alum.*

*As first appeared in Education Week, November 11, 2009. Reprinted with permission from the author.*

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Jeff Kass

## FROM THE FRONT OF THE ROOM: **Permit me to praise some teachers who deserve it**

Posted: Today, 4 hours ago

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I just want to say one thing.

Michigan teachers do not play.

What I mean by that is, listen, we're hearing horror stories about education in our state. The legislature in Lansing is slashing funding mid-year, and the only question is how bloody the hurt to inflict. The millage in Washtenaw County went down in resounding fashion. All kinds of innovative programs are trembling, waiting with their necks beneath the blade, expecting to be cut any second. Teachers all over the state fear for their jobs, and for the jobs of their colleagues.

Yeah, so...

Michigan teachers are battlers. Michigan teachers will not cave in to despair. They will do the best with what they have and they won't stop there.

They will try to make that best better.

I say this because I just spent three days at the National Council of Teachers of English annual convention in Philadelphia, and I attended about 15 presentations. Most of these were mediocre - teachers rehashing ideas that have already been around for a quarter century, or presenting newish ones in a manner so flat you could balance the 12 cups of coffee on them that you need to drink just to stay awake while you're listening.

Not so with Michigan teachers.

Every thing I saw a Michigan teacher do, every word I heard a Michigan teacher say, made me proud to teach in this state. It's no secret Michigan's struggling right now. The industries that built us are wrestling with how to survive, how to reinvent themselves so they can remain sustainable and relevant. But one thing you can say about Michigan - a thing you always can have said about Michigan - is people here know how to work. An honest day's labor is our cultural heritage. We wake up and we pull our shifts and we

don't shirk our responsibilities because we understand if we do, our colleagues will suffer. Our communities will suffer.

Michigan teachers are no different. We live by that same code. We come to work to be good at what we do, to be *damn* good at what we do, regardless whether our working environment feels happy or hopeful. We put our collective shoulder to the wheel and we make that mother roll.

Here are some highlights of what I saw:

**Sarah Andrew-Vaughan's** hands. Sarah is a teacher at Huron High School and whether she's breaking down step-by-step her spectacular unfamiliar genre project, an endeavor which asks students to spelunk through alien literary neighborhoods in order to broaden their understanding of how to read and write; or whether she's arguing we should have after-school workshops where math teachers demonstrate to their colleagues the best ways to understand calculus - *problem-solving across the curriculum is just as important as writing across the curriculum* - her dreams are so vital she can barely contain them. They shake her shoulders and elbows and her hands flit like birds, flying into and through the hearts and brains of one imagined future student to another as she envisions her next great idea, her next new way to make her classroom magic.

**Cathy Fleischer's** huge wide-open eyes. Cathy's a professor at Eastern Michigan and a mentor to countless area teachers. When you propose an idea to her, she listens with her whole face, especially those eyes that seem to see and know everything with the kind of expertise one would attribute to a field general surveying a vast plain and conceiving the shape of battles ahead. Whether she's teaming with Sarah to present the book they co-wrote, or introducing a panel of teachers she demands everybody pay rapt attention to, or standing in the dead middle of the convention center waiting to meet with yet *another* teacher she'll offer advice to, her switch is flipped on. She is alert. She's focused. She's not about to waste anybody's time. Not for a minute.

**Chuck Hatt's** smile. Chuck's the coordinator of Social Studies and Literacy Instruction for Ann Arbor Public Schools, and you've never seen a face more lit with passion than when he mentions some author or book you've never heard of and he tells you, *you absolutely need to read this!*

The back of **Jennifer Walsh's** shoulders. Jennifer is the Language Arts Department Chair at Forsythe Middle School, and I say the back of her shoulders because all you can do is follow her as she zooms through the exhibition hall seeking out as many materials as she can find to purchase (with her own money) to stock her classroom. A discount that allows her to buy an audio-book for \$10 (three for \$30) is an answered prayer.

**Anne Gere's** stately elegance. Anne Gere is the director of the ground-breaking Joint

English and Education PhD. Program at the University of Michigan, and if she wanted to be, she could be a Senator. Probably a Majority Leader. When she stands in front of a group of teachers detailing the research she and her colleagues **Victoria Haviland** and **Jennifer Buehler** have conducted, and the strategies they've uncovered to demonstrate how multi-cultural perspectives can help decrease the achievement gap, she owns the room. She makes the material she's presenting feel as important as health care reform or climate change legislation. And it *is* that important. We can't fully address any of our problems without a dynamically educated populace. Anne Gere insists every teacher understands why this means we can't allow ourselves to give in to despair, and she'll keep owning rooms until we all learn how to own them ourselves.

And then there's the whole package - the hands, the eyes, the smile, the shoulders, the unyielding and dignified determination. That's what you will find at Pioneer Middle School in Plymouth where educators **Carmen Johnson**, **Jason Kaye**, **Ben McMurray** and **Claire Walton-Swisher** last year created the Pioneer Peace Project.

Listen, forget about test scores. You don't know what teachers are capable of until you've seen this crew show you what they did when they brought their eighth grade students to New York City along with the children's author Todd Parr, and, equipped with 500 autographed copies of his book; Peace Bags donated by California Pizza Kitchen; and buttons that say Imagine Peace in different languages donated by Yoko Ono (!!!); they had the kids interview New Yorkers on the streets, read them Parr's book, give them the Peace Bags and buttons, and then come back to Plymouth and create a spectacular museum-quality display of photographs, poems and essays detailing their experiences in the city and their reflections on the concept of peace.

You don't know what teaching is until you hear the story about how some of these kids met a soldier on the Staten Island Ferry who'd just returned from a tour in Iraq and was preparing for another in Afghanistan. When the students explained their project to him, he asked them where they were headed after they got off the ferry. When they told him Ground Zero, he said he'd been there when the terrorist attacks happened and asked if he could accompany them to the site and show them what he saw. The photograph one of the students took of this soldier standing in the rain, students huddled around him, as he points upward - presumably to where the Twin Towers used to be - his face an archive of emotion, is a picture of the very best teaching there is, the kind of teaching that's unforgettable.

So props to Michigan teachers. Mad props. Our state's economy ain't pretty right now. No doubt. But these teachers, man, they're miracles. They work hard. There's hope.

**\*\* NOTE \*\* Speaking of miracles and hope ...** our biggest Poetry event of the year is coming up - Poetry Night in Ann Arbor - on Friday night, Dec. 11 @ Rackham Auditorium. This year's show (our 10th annual) will feature the return of some of Ann Arbor's favorite performance poets: Roger Bonair-Agard from New York, Kevin Coval from Chicago and

Lauren Whitehead, a U-M alum currently residing in San Francisco. Joining these mic-rockers on stage will be terrific high school poets from the nationally acclaimed VOLUME Youth Poetry Project and the spectacular collegiate spoken word troupe Ann Arbor Wordworks. The show starts @ 7pm. Doors open @ 6:30. Advance tickets are \$5 for students and \$10 for general public and \$7 and \$12 respectively at the door. For more info or to reserve tickets at the advanced price, contact me @ 734-223-7443 or via email @ eyelev21@aol.com.

*Jeff Kass teaches Creative Writing at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor and at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, and directs the Literary Arts Programs at the Neutral Zone, including the VOLUME Youth Poetry Project, which meets every Thursday night at 7pm. He will post new blog entries every Tuesday and Thursday morning throughout the school year, but he won't write one on Thanksgiving. See you next Tuesday. Give thanks.*

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