

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - September 13, 2012

Education news potpourri

by Paula Bienenfeld
Chair, MCCF Education Committee

The Civic Federation Education Committee offers a hearty Welcome Back! to all our Montgomery County public school students, as the school year began on Monday, August 27th.

BOE Candidates' Forum--

The Federation will hold a Board of Education Candidates' Forum on Wednesday, October 17, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Rockville Library. The library is located at 21 Maryland Avenue in downtown Rockville. The event is free and open to the public.

The candidates who will be participating in the forum are: Chris Barclay and Annita Seckinger, who running in District 4; Fred Evans and Rebecca Smondrowski, who are running in District 2; and Phil Kaufmann and Morris Panner, who are both running At-Large.

Mark your calendar now and plan on attending this important event. The Board of Education is responsible for spending over half of our entire county budget, with an annual budget for Montgomery County Public Schools that exceeds \$2 billion. Even if you do not have children in the schools, this enormous amount of money and how it is spent affects every county resident and every aspect of county life.

Come to the Civic Federation Forum and watch the questioning of the candidates who are running to serve on the Board of Education as to how they intend to spend the schools budget, and on a range of other issues, too. We need to elect the most competent candidates to the Board in November, so we can insure county taxpayers are getting their money's worth and that county school students are getting the great education they need and deserve to compete in an increasingly competitive jobs market.

If you would like to submit ideas for questions to be put to the candidates, you can email them to me, Paula Bienenfeld, at montgomerycivic@yahoo.com. And please write "BOE Forum" as the subject line of your email. Questions should be emailed by the end of the day on Friday, October 12.

Pearson Curriculum--

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) continues its rollout of the Pearson curriculum, also known as "Curriculum 2.0". It is expected to be in place for use in all kindergarten through third grade classes throughout the county this year. In addition, report card grades issued to students will be changed to better align with the new curriculum.

Pearson publishes textbooks for a range of educational disciplines, and develops curricula that use a wide variety of research-based, easy-to-use, well integrated teaching and learning tools.

Mathletes challenges--

In August the Washington Post ran an article about our Montgomery County Math Team, or "mathletes" as they are known, those best and brightest students who work hard and long hours to excel at competitive math. These kids compete at the highest levels and many will be going on to colleges and universities like MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Yale University. And yet, MCPS funding for these students is...wait for it...\$0. That's right--zero dollars.

Out of a budget of \$2.1 billion, it is odd that neither the County Council nor the Board of Education can find the money to sponsor these children, or raise the amount of money through private donations. It is odder still that in a county with so many millionaires and even a few billionaires, and which is home to major multinational businesses like Lockheed Martin and J.W. Marriott, the county government cannot persuade any of our wealthy individuals or businesses to throw a few thousand dollars in the direction of worthy efforts by our best students.

The complete story from the Washington Post can be found on the internet at <http://tinyurl.com/wpmathletes>. Montgomery County's "mathletes" team coach is Eric Walstein, a mathematics professor at Montgomery Blair High School. He is due to retire soon. According to the newspaper article, the future of the county's Math Team is unknown.

In contrast, according to a recent story in the Washington Post, "New York City's [mathletes team] is sponsored by global investment firm D.E. Shaw, and Lehigh Valley's (with a budget of about \$14,000) by a local entrepreneur, a matching grant from Google and Lehigh University, while Phillips Exeter's has a generous stipend from the private school and is able to recruit from all around the world. It is also coached by the professor who oversees the U.S. team going to the International Mathematical Olympiad."

In Montgomery County, one of the richest county's in the nation ranked on per capita income, our officials and well off private citizens and businesses should be able to provide our talented and hard working mathletes with the financial support they need to compete in this worthwhile endeavor.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net