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# Off the Beat: New faces on Northampton School Committee roll up their sleeves

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer

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Tuesday, March 2, 2010

northampton - The four newest School Committee members have been hard at work since January attending school board, subcommittee and school council meetings, discussing education issues with administrators and the community, and taking part in a leadership retreat last week. What follows are a summary of some of their positions.

Alden Bourne

Bourne suggests the School Committee release a regular newsletter to every household in the city with information about classes, programs and the School Committee's work. He said he believes it's critical city residents understand how their property tax dollars are spent in the school system. Bourne also said he feels "blessed" the special education parent advisory committee, schools watch group and school councils are active and engaged, and hopes to see more of that.

"The more people who are paying attention to what we're doing and bringing us tough questions and compelling questions, the better," Bourne said.

Timothy Fisher

Fisher said he is interested in taking a new look at the school choice program to generate revenue.

"It's become a bigger part of the whole budget process," Fisher said. He noted other school districts actively recruit school choice students.


"I would be for actively marketing if we knew how we were going to do it and how many seats we'd be able to offer," Fisher said. "You could end up shooting yourself in the foot if you end up accepting too many kids and you don't have enough teachers to teach them."

Downey Meyer


In light of the estimated \$1.3 million budget gap next fiscal year, Meyer proposes the school district seek help for free. He said he recently talked with a UMass professor at the Y who offered to share his expertise in education assessment, and he knows of city parents who are professional pollsters that could help create surveys on school budget issues.

"We have a lot of people who do amazing things in their day jobs and the incredible thing is a lot of people are willing to do even more," Meyer said. "I don't want to miss the opportunity to take

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advantage of that."

He also said he supports restoring positions that have been cut, including curriculum coordinator and grant coordinator positions.

James Young

Young said he would like to see the school district's Web site spruced up with short videos clips or Power Point presentations on issues like the budget, which are presented at length during meetings.

"It's a public resource for people who don't have an opportunity to get to the meetings to get up to speed," Young said of the Web site.

It is also, he said, a place to relay information to the public from topic-based forums and subcommittee meetings, though Young encourages people to attend the meetings.

"Subcommittee meetings, that's when we really have the time to focus on an issue," Young said.

"Constituents will say #you get at the meeting and you vote on the issue like it's nothing.' Well, we've already gone through it by the time we get to School Committee meetings."

###

Fencer meets goal

Abigail Delamater, 16, a sophomore at Northampton High School, reached beyond her goal at the Junior Olympic National Fencing Championships in Memphis, placing 104th out of 145 competitors in the junior women's foil and 67th out of 179 contestants in the cadet women's foil. "She had guessed she'd place somewhere in the middle but she was actually closer to being in the top third," said Paul Sise, owner of Pioneer Valley Fencing Academy, where Delamater trains. She is also a member of the Northampton High School fencing team.

Delamater, a "D" rated fencer, beat an "A" rated fencer in the cadet event. Level "A" is the highest on the "E" through "A" scale. "That's fantastic, absolutely fantastic," Sise said "To beat an #A' is definitely difficult."

###

Transportation forum

Northampton schools will hold the first in a series of community forums Monday, March 15 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at JFK Middle School. A panel discussion will address pre-submitted questions regarding bussing and transportation. Participants are asked to submit their questions to Nicole Markel with "Transportation Forum" in the subject line at [nmarkel@northampton-k12.us](mailto:nmarkel@northampton-k12.us) before Monday, March 8. Only pre-submitted questions will be addressed.

###

"Bye Bye Birdie"

About 130 high school students will put on the spring musical, "Bye Bye Birdie," March 11, 12 and 13. Tickets are on sale in the school's main office from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and beginning Thursday, tickets will be available in the bus loop entrance from 4 to 6:30 p.m.

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