

'Success was easier to achieve yesterday than it will be tomorrow.'

Cheryl Wilhoyte

OPINION

13A

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OUR OPINION

Abortion tactic cowardly

If "exposing" an abortion provider to the provider's colleagues, neighbors and friends is such an honorable thing to do, why do it anonymously?

Let whoever is mailing out postcards about Dr. Elizabeth Karlin step forward and receive their just reward.

Hundreds (if not thousands) of Madison-area residents have received anonymous postcards in recent weeks that say "For your information. . . Elizabeth Karlin is an ABORTIONIST."



Karlin

The card also contains addresses and phone numbers for Karlin's home and office — but no such information, not even a name, on who is sending out the cards.

What are they ashamed of?

Gina Shaw of the National Abortion Federation in Washington, D.C., says the "For your information" mass-produced postcards have been traced in similar incidents to Life Dynamics Inc. That's the name of a Texas company that sells propaganda to anti-abortion groups all over the nation. The postcards are sold in minimum batches of 1,000; posters are available as well, along with mailing lists, pictures of aborted fetuses, and — for the ultimate in bad taste — anti-abortion joke books. (Example: What would you do if you were in a room with Hitler, Mussolini and

an abortionist but you only had two bullets? Answer: Shoot the abortionist twice.)

Shaw says the American Medical Association received a court order barring Life Dynamics Inc. from selling the AMA's mailing list, which Life Dynamics acquired under false pretenses. Real honorable bunch of folks.

The debate over abortion rights continues to divide this country, but the pro-life forces alienate a lot of people if they condone tactics ranging from the merely sneaky (anonymous postcards) to the terrorist (direct physical attacks on abortion providers). To date, the lunatic fringe of the movement opposing abortion rights has murdered one abortion provider, attempted to murder another and kidnapped two more. Eighty-five abortion providers or their patients have been physically assaulted; 145 death threats and 288 bomb threats have been reported; 36 clinics have been bombed; 83 set on fire, 494 vandalized, including Karlin's in Madison.

Abortion rights foes will respond that in the 20 years since the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade, a million unborn babies a year have been murdered by legal abortions. Some feel that horrendous number justifies the use of violence, but the majority do not. They would rather see the abortion issue argued and won on moral grounds — but the anti-abortion terrorists are ceding the rights to the moral high ground with cowardly and/or violent attacks.

Like the good guys used to say in the old westerns: Come on out and fight in the open. What have you got to hide?

YOUR OPINION

We welcome letters of 200 or fewer words on matters of public interest. Letters are subject to editing; not all can be run. Please sign and include your address and telephone number. Names and hometowns will be published. Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, Wisconsin State Journal, P.O. Box 8058, Madison, Wis. 53708

Balanced budget still eludes us

In the aftermath of the budget battle, the gloom and doom naysayers seem to have been off-target. The stock market has soared to new heights, bonds are at an attractive level, interest rates are at a two-decade low, and inflation is minimal.

The new budget slows the growth of the deficit. According to the Government Accounting Office, the deficit in five years will be 40 percent less than previously predicted.

Why, then, if we can cut \$100 billion from the deficit for each of five years, can we not go further to a balanced budget? Such an action would send economic shock waves across the country and abroad and take us into a deeper recession.

Cold reality indicates that the U.S. government is a primary player in the total economy. If we just look at one single area, our government is our largest employer, 2.5 million employees. If, for example, every employee from the president on down were laid off, the savings would be far less than half the deficit or about \$125 billion.

It took 12 years to raise the debt by \$3 trillion and a short-term solution coming from either the Republicans or Democrats is highly unlikely.

Despite this budget's tentative step toward fiscal responsibility there remains the greater crisis, namely, our seeming inability to agree to pay for the



things we want from our government through equitable and progressive taxation.

— Philip H. Smith, Madison

their educational choice for them!

— Kathleen Otterson, Madison

A 'fee' public education

It should surprise no one that student fees in area schools have increased dramatically this year. But let's be sure to lay the blame for this where it belongs, squarely on the shoulders of Gov. Tommy Thompson and his cronies in the budget committee. Somehow, they have failed to understand a very simple equation: more students plus increasing prices on everything from copy paper to toilet paper equals higher costs. Slashing state aid for schools forces the school district to be the bad guy, and make up for the shortfall by increasing fees.

But that's Thompson's way: if you want it, you can pay for it. "Free and equal" education? This is a phrase that does not exist in our governor's vocabulary. How unfortunate for the children of our state that such a person has made

Veteran coin finder

I am a disabled veteran of World War II. I received my Purple Heart on D-Day, 1944. I feel like we fought for our country and for equal rights.

I have an expensive "Coin Master" metal detector that tells the coin you are finding and also the depth. Most coins are in the grass where people lay, like where the concerts, etc. are held on the Capitol grounds. I am not allowed on this property with my "Coin Master." All I use is an ice-pick to dig them up.

Many people and children, even the guards, are curious to see how the "Coin Master" works and I enjoy showing them. On the Capitol Square they have band concerts, pot rallies, abortion rallies, political doings, art, Farmers' Market and many others but a disabled veteran doesn't have this right. Why?

— Ralph A. Woodward, Columbus

WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

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Wilhoyte: Excellent schools must get better

Editor's note: The following edited account was compiled using prepared text and Madison School Superintendent Cheryl Wilhoyte's handwritten notes from her "State of the District" speech Tuesday night.

By Cheryl Wilhoyte

Tonight is an opportunity for me to give you my initial assessment of our schools and to provide a progress report on the implementation of the district's strategic plan for the future, Madison Schools 2000. Second and most importantly, tonight serves as an invitation to each of you to join us and take inventory of our schools' successes and shortcomings, and then identify a place where your involvement will build a truly community-based partnership on behalf of the children of Madison.

Let me begin by saying plainly and simply that the Madison School District is in excellent shape. This community possesses one of the very best school districts in the country. This is not my judgment, though I certainly agree with the assessment. This is the opinion of Money magazine, which recently rated Madison the second-best place to live in America. It is the opinion of Expansion Management magazine, which gives advice to businesses on where to locate. This national journal placed the Madison school district among the top 4 percent of school systems in the nation, praising the achievement and positive learning environment in our schools.

A national research organization this year ranked Madison the third-best city in America for children, citing the schools as a major factor. The federal Department of Education has recognized all four of our high schools, a middle school and two elementary schools as National Schools of Excellence. To my knowledge, Madison is the only district in the country in which all of the high schools have been recognized as Schools of Excellence.

Year after year, Madison students perform significantly better than both the state and national averages on achievement tests. While many communities anguish over declining student achievement, the test scores of Madison students are improving.

A changing city

Times are changing, though. Like communities all across the nation, Madison has changed dramatically in the last five years, and the community and the schools are just now being confronted by the educational implication of this change.

Success was easier to achieve yesterday than it will be tomorrow. In the past, this district's teachers have had the best resources with which to work and there have been an extremely high number of parents actively involved in the education of their children. As we return to educating children tomorrow morning, we will be working with increasing numbers of students who do not come from economically stable families. Our community is feeding children who come to school hungry, providing counseling to children who are trying to cope with profound emotional and social problems.

Nearly a quarter of our students now live in poverty. Just in the last five years, the number of children in Madison schools who live in families receiving AFDC has grown by more than a third. Even more troubling is the fact that more than 40 percent of the children in the district who receive AFDC have not yet reached school age. Despite these demographic trends, Madison receives no aid under the two largest state programs for economically disadvantaged children and the district actually receives less general state aid today than it did 10 years ago.

In the last two years, the number of students with disabilities we are serving has increased by 20 percent at a cost which has gone up 170 percent over the last 10 years. Yet the percentage of these costs picked up by the state has been steadily declining, placing a greater and greater share of the burden on the shoulders of our local property taxpayers.

We are faced with an enormous challenge. Success for every student is our vision, mission and must be our bottom line. Guaranteeing success for every student in the 1990s and in the 21st century will require us to adapt to changing circumstances. The schools here have traditionally done a great job of educating the highly able and typically all-American average student. But as families, social and economic realities change, educational needs likewise are changing dramatically and that means developing the flexibility to meet the needs of a more diverse student population.

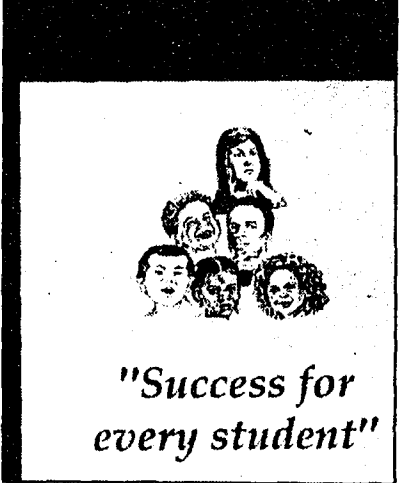
Basic choice

As we take on this challenge, we confront a fundamental choice. We can have "schools of memory," which cling to approaches to education that worked well in a bygone era, or "schools of imagination" in which our human and financial resources are used in creative new ways to adapt to emerging realities. This community has made a clear choice, Madison Schools 2000: people of imagination designing a community building its future within schools of excellence and imagination.

Madison 2000 means changing our teaching strategies to bring them in line with what we know about how children learn best. We are changing from the program-driven, input-oriented, memorization-test approach of the past 100 years, to an approach which identifies exit competencies for grades 5, 8 and 12 in terms of student mastery of communication, computing and real-life problem-solving strategies and thinking skills for an information society full of active, community-based learning settings.

In the past, the constants were programs, materials, and time in one's seat which yielded credits and diplomas, and learning was the variable — with the level of learning dependent on the student's ability to fit into the system which in turn was easily predicted by the student's socioeconomic level and mother's level of education.

The teaching and learning strategies of the '90s must make student success for each and every learner the bottom line. Madison schools must continue to be the best for the talented and gifted, the all-American students, and the best for students with special challenges that they have always been and now also become the best in the nation for students from impoverished backgrounds.



State Journal photo/MEG THENO

Cheryl Wilhoyte delivers State of District address Tuesday.

Reduce poverty

Education is our best defense. Think for a moment about two young families with children, just starting out. In one of the families, one or both of the parents has a high school diploma. In the other family, neither parent does. What's the poverty level for children in each type of family? Education will reduce the chances for poverty more than anything else.

The level of education counts! Who would you say has a longer life expectancy in the United States: the white male or the African-American male? The new data perhaps will surprise you: When both are college educated, there is little difference.

There is an alarming relationship between education and crime. More than 80 percent of America's 1 million prisoners are high school dropouts. It costs upwards of \$20,000 per year to maintain a prisoner, a poor return on investment when 83 percent released return to jail for serious crime within three years. For every \$1 spent for Head Start, the taxpayer saves \$7 in later services not needed.

In the future, the next generation is predicted to change careers six or seven times over the course of their work life. To function effectively in an increasingly complex world, students will need to develop a capacity for lifelong learning. In other words, success can no longer be measured by how many books students have read or what courses they have completed. It must be measured by how well they can think and what they can do after they read a book or complete a course or graduate from school.

Safety in schools

In order for learning to occur, of course, a safe and secure school environment that is conducive to learning is essential. The Madison Schools 2000 plan has guided us in developing a comprehensive, proactive approach to promoting safety in our schools, emphasizing prevention as well as intervention.

There are four components to the program. First, there is a comprehensive student conduct and discipline plan, which clearly states the rights and responsibilities of students and parents, defines appropriate conduct and outlines disciplinary options ranging from "time-outs" to expulsion. Methods of discipline also include innovative approaches such as homebound instruction, which provides students who need to be removed from the regular school environment the opportunity to keep learning and at the same time address the social problems that led to their temporary expulsion from the mainstream.

Students and parents know up front our expectations and the consequences if these expectations are not met. This school district's policy is firm — school is about the business of learning and we have zero tolerance for any business that detracts from learning.

The second component of the safety program: Districtwide educational outreach efforts are aimed at both making students and parents aware of the district's conduct and discipline policy as well as providing district staff with training in crisis intervention and conflict resolution supported by an excellent training by Madison Police.

We have implemented security measures with police liaison officers at each middle and high school, outside security personnel at all high schools and a Crimestoppers Hotline that is available to all students 24 hours a day. Picture IDs are required on buses, at school, and in school parking lots and video cameras have been placed on selected buses.

And fourth, we have employed pioneering, student-centered strategies such as peer mediation, which engages students trained in conflict resolution in the process of mediating disputes.

This approach to promoting school safety has proven effective. For example, what has happened at Cherokee Heights Middle School over the last two years is a real success story. There has been a 65 percent drop in the number of referrals to the office and the number of suspensions has been cut nearly in half.

Another example is East High School. Recent teacher surveys at East documented a 76 percent decrease in reports of student tardiness and showed dramatic improvements in attendance as well as overall school safety. It goes to show what can be accomplished by a concerted team effort.

Partners

According to the most recent study entitled "Madison's Children," we know that poverty together with single parenthood are the leading indicators of student failure. Schools cannot cure the ills of society. The community as a whole must wrestle with the causes of poverty and the breakdown of the family structure and create educational, economic and social conditions which encourage stable, nurturing families. That is why one of the

central action plans of Madison Schools 2000 is the development of community partnerships.

We are committed to forging meaningful partnerships with government agencies, businesses, and parent and community groups. We have our school teams organizing with county service teams and city police around middle school neighborhood units to assure maximum service to return families to self sufficiency. We have pledged our support to private business groups seeking to stabilize housing for low-income students because high mobility and poverty are detriments to high achievement.

Changes at top

Putting wheels under the Madison Schools 2000 action plans also means embracing change and "organized abandonment."

The reorganization of our central office that we implemented last month represents a 180-degree shift, from top-down management to an administrative structure built on the idea of support teams focused and positioned to cater to the unique needs of schools, teachers and individual students in order to ensure school and student success.

This new alignment will allow us to focus on more flexible, school-based approaches that produce the desired results — schools accountable for high achievement, participation and a can-do attitude about learning. More specifically, it will enable our central office staff to be out in the schools facilitating the development of School Improvement Plans, supervising and coaching our school-level staff, coordinating staff development activities and providing the data base to support school based instructional decision-making.

In order to assure quality service to students, parents and staff members, we have also created an Office of Customer Service, a one-stop response center for anyone who has a question about our schools or a problem that needs to be solved. And we've set up a customer service hotline — 266-HELP — that people can call for assistance.

Our new organizational structure is the vessel in which we can navigate the bold course charted by the Madison Schools 2000 strategic plan. It permits us to better support what is going on in our schools at the same time we are doing some streamlining and slimming down. We have rolled back our staff to the 1990-91 staffing level. And we are making do with fewer administrators than we've had in the past, even though our staff is already more lean than the average school district in Wisconsin.

This community has to realize, however, that we can only go so far with administrative cuts. Staff development will play a crucial role in the successful implementation of our strategic plan. We must be a "learning organization" for adults if we are to be a learning organization for children.

We can't put our new teaching and learning strategies in place, or improve customer service, or cultivate needed community partnerships without leadership. I am committed to assuring success for staff — requiring a satisfactory excellent level of performance by all. Less than that will not be tolerated. We hold the same high standards for adults as we do for children.

Property taxes

I understand the concern over rising property taxes. It is a legitimate concern. Property taxes in Wisconsin are almost 20 percent above the national average. In Madison, the property tax burden is compounded by the fact that property values here are 83 percent higher than the statewide average, while the incomes of Madison residents are only 14 percent higher.

The state's response to escalating property taxes is to impose limits on school spending. These limits have forced us to limit summer school, reduce purchases of text materials, cut back on building maintenance and custodial services, increase fees, eliminate some teaching positions and do without much-needed supplies and equipment. If these limits remain in place more than one year, we will eventually be forced to increase class sizes and cut programs for children with special needs.

The sad irony is that the state's current approach won't provide meaningful property tax relief. Several years down the road, children will have suffered and property taxpayers will still be wondering when they will get a break.

We sorely need comprehensive reform of the way we pay for education in this state. Property taxpayers are buckling under the weight of paying for schools. Yet more than ever our children need us to invest in their future and our future. In the weeks and months to come, we will be lobbying for school finance reform that both creates a sound financial foundation for public schools and relieves the burden on property taxpayers. Our children cannot wait for two to three years. Their minds and bones and hearts are being shaped today and tomorrow. This day and this school year will never come again. It must be the best now.

I welcome the challenge of being the focal point of this community's efforts to make sure that a life full of opportunity and dignity awaits each and every one of our young people. But again, I must emphasize, this challenge is not the educator's alone. Each of us must make a difference.

So I close with a story and a challenge to you: Children are so wise — may we be the same. Once upon a time, it was sunrise on the ocean beach which had been hard hit the night before by a powerful storm with unusually high tides.

A young boy was walking among the thousands of starfish stranded by the receding tides. For as far as you could see, the beach was covered by stranded and dying starfish. Each time the boy would come upon a starfish he would bend over, pick up the star and toss it as far as he could beyond the crashing waves back to the life-giving waters. He was in a race with the drying warmth of the rising sun.

An old man watched for a while and then followed close enough to ask his question of the young boy. "Son," he asked, "Why do you keep doing that? You can't possibly save all these thousands of starfish."

The young boy picked up another star and hurled it as best he could back into the cool, wet sea. "Sir, that may be, but I sure can make a difference for that one!" he replied.

We give our children two things: roots and wings. Each of us must make a difference in our reach for the star.