

New School Board Member: Focus on Dr. Bill Foster

Citizens For Education welcomes Dr. Bill Foster, recently elected to the Council Rock School Board from Region 1 (representing Newtown Borough – Wards 1 and 2, and Newtown Township – Districts 4, 5, 6). Dr. Foster, a research toxicologist with Bristol-Myers Squibb in Princeton, brings his enthusiasm, optimism, and diverse background to this 4-year volunteer position. He is hopeful that more Council Rock residents will come to school board meetings, get involved, and maintain a dialogue with the school board members about their children's education.

Dr. Foster's educational background includes dual undergraduate degrees in Chemical Engineering and English from Carnegie Mellon University (1985). In addition, he earned both a Master's degree in Chemical Engineering (1990) and a PhD in Neuroscience (1994) from the University of Pennsylvania. His work experience includes night shift employment at a small family-owned chemical company in Florida, and a post-doctoral fellowship at Penn's Institute for Human Gene Therapy. He was also employed by chemical giant DuPont during and after graduate school, and after DuPont's Pharma division was acquired by Bristol-Myers Squibb, has been an employee of BMS for the last 10 years, where he applies his training in bioinformatics to pharmaceutical drug safety investigations.

In between his undergraduate and graduate school years, Dr. Foster also spent two years as a USA Peace Corps volunteer, teaching chemistry and physics to rural students in Ghana. The experience of living in a small village, eight hours away from the nearest American, steeped him in all things diverse: people, clothing, and food. In an effort to improve both the Ghanaian schools and the Peace Corps, Foster applied for and received a grant from the Canadian government to expand the school and also organized a conference for other Peace Corps volunteers to improve their ability to teach the children. Before leaving Ghana, he documented his lessons learned and identified current needs, leaving a path forward for the next volunteer assigned to his small village.

Since moving from Wilmington, Delaware seven years ago, Dr. Foster resides in Newtown Borough with his wife, Jennifer, a landscape architect with Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, and their two young children. In his limited free time, Dr. Foster, a licensed small aircraft pilot and member of a flying club in Doylestown, enjoys flying over the beautiful Bucks County landscape. He also enjoys backyard gardening, and successfully grew a small wheat crop, which he harvested, threshed, ground into flour, and turned into pancakes with his daughter.

Dr. Foster has several goals as a member of the Council Rock School Board, and chief among them is financial sustainability. The state budget is critical to this issue, as is the teacher pension fund (Public School Employees' Retirement System, PSERS), which by itself could result in approximately \$2 million increased spending for next year. Dr. Foster feels that creative approaches at the local and state levels are needed to deal with the increasing cost of education.

Dr. Foster also desires more mobility for teachers between school districts. Ideally, he would like to see a system in which teachers can increase their experience by having the ability to move to different districts for a period of time, and then move back to their home district without losing their tenure. This would allow a cross pollination of some of the best ideas among districts, and also permit teachers to find the best niche for themselves.

Dr. Foster is one of two school board members assigned to oversee the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology (MBIT), and would like to see more Council Rock students attend MBIT or at least seriously consider it, as he feels it has excellent facilities, staff, and opportunities. Noting the ongoing discussions concerning returning graded work to students (tests and other assessments), Dr. Foster feels strongly that all students deserve this important feedback, and that teachers should be encouraged to return student work on a timely basis. With the burgeoning availability of new computer technologies, Dr. Foster is very interested in the evolution of teaching methods and tools, and wants

to ensure teachers stay current and measures are put in place to gauge the effective use of new technology in the district. In student athletics, Dr. Foster believes that with the relentless decrease in opportunities for adults and children to be physically active in their daily lives, there should be a greater emphasis on those sports that you can take with you as you grow older, such as cross country running and swimming.

With young children, and his experience in pharmaceuticals where it can take a decade or more to get a new drug to market, Dr. Foster takes the long view for Council Rock's future by considering what the district should look like ten years from now. He has found his fellow board members to be sincere and good people who have Council Rock students' best interests in mind, along with balancing administrative, budgetary, and community needs. Like all collaborative situations, he realizes that it can be time consuming to come to a consensus, but is looking forward to the opportunity to work alongside his fellow board members. Citizens For Education thanks Dr. Foster for his time. His optimism and diverse background are sure to be an asset to the Council Rock School Board.