



Citizens for Education



Spring Issue

May 2007

The objectives of Citizens for Education are to ensure a quality education for all students of the Council Rock School District, to better inform the Council Rock community of educational issues, and to increase the involvement of the community in the decision making processes affecting the quality of education in Council Rock.

Act 1 Scene 2

It is important that registered voters in Council Rock go to the polls on May 15th to decide whether to increase the Earned Income Tax (EIT) and create a tax shift from property taxes to local income tax. If passed, Council Rock residents who have earned income will have their taxes increased, and the owners of homes who have filed a Homestead/Farmstead application will receive a rebate on only their primary residence. **Most primaries see an approximately 15% voter turnout. Don't let a small minority determine what happens to your income. Make your voice heard.**

This tax shift is revenue neutral to the school district, meaning that there is **no additional money going to fund education**. The Council Rock Board of School Directors, as required by the new property tax legislation Act 1, has approved a question to be placed on the ballot for the May 15th primary. Voters will be asked:

"Do you favor the Council Rock School District imposing an additional 0.9% earned income tax? The revenue generated from the increased tax rate will be used to reduce school taxes on qualified residential properties by an estimated \$942.00. The current school district earned income tax rate is 0.5%."

If passed the total EIT for Council Rock residents would be 1.9% (.5% to the township and 1.4% to the school district). Those residing in Wrightstown Township also pay an

(Continued on page 2)

School Safety Task Force Recommendations

Where are we now?

In 1999, amid the horror and tears from Columbine, the Council Rock School District formed the School Safety Task Force (SSTF). The Task Force's charge culminated with a list of recommendations presented to the School Board in 2000. Since then, school safety and security have catapulted in public awareness. Through the years, questions and issues have arisen and Citizens has continually kept school safety and security a priority. For example, upon learning of the power outages at Council Rock High School (now North), and their safety implications, Citizens provided every classroom with flashlights. We compiled a list of issues and related recommendations and met regularly with associated members of the Administration to monitor their status.

Citizens met with Supervisor of Operational Services Tom Schneider and District Security Manager Bill Reick to get an update on the district's progress on these recommendations.

Safety in our schools requires that we do all we can, inside and out, to keep our children out of harms way. Recently, it was stated by the Administration that ten of the fourteen recommendations of the SSTF Facilities Subcommittee have been implemented to date. Mr. Schneider discussed the remaining four recommendations.

1. Cameras be installed at all buildings

At this time both high schools have security cameras installed. Some are Webcams allowing for instantaneous utilization. This also al-

(Continued on page 2)

(Act 1 Scene 2 continued from page 1)

additional 0.15% EIT for open space preservation which is not included in the total EIT represented in this article.

Citizens for Education believes that the state legislature has not effectively addressed property tax relief with Act 1 because no additional funds are directed to the school districts and the state funding formula has not changed.

Citizens recommends voting against any additional EIT to send a message to the legislature that the community wants a more equitable formula for the funding of education and true property tax relief.

A “Yes” vote increases the school district portion of the earned income tax from the current 0.5% to 1.4% (total EIT of 1.9%) and gives a rebate to the homeowner of an estimated \$942. If more applications have been filed than expected, the rebate would be less. Unfortunately, the state will not inform the school district of the number of applications until the beginning of May. The state required that ballot language, including an estimated rebate amount, be approved prior to the school district knowing what the actual rebate will be.

The amount of the rebate will be fixed. Everyone, no matter how little or large their current assessment, or subsequent tax bill, will get the same rebate amount. Based on the estimated \$942 figure, any homeowner(s) with combined earned income greater than \$104,000 will pay more in earned income tax than their anticipated rebate and homeowner(s) with combined earned income less than \$104,000 will benefit. How large the income tax benefit will be depends on how much less than \$104,000 the income earnings are. Should there be a lower rebate, the “break even” income would be lower.

(Continued on page 3)

(School Safety Task Force continued from page 1)

allows township police departments to have access in the event of an emergency. While cameras are not in the plans for all buildings, Citizens sees the benefits for numerous reasons. Security cameras are a valuable tool for surveillance, prevention and prosecutorial purposes.

When used for purposes of surveillance, closed circuit television (CCTV) allows personnel to observe and therefore eliminate areas of repeated problems and undesirable behaviors such as bullying, etc. Students deserve to feel safe in the school environment. Expanding on the use for security cameras or CCTV also helps prevent further crimes. Evidence on cameras enables security and perhaps law enforcement to stop future offenses and more expansive crimes *before* they happen. As a deterrent, they provide peace of mind to students, staff and the community. As stated in a report published by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, this perception ultimately may contribute to how the facility is perceived by both occupants and outsiders. Used for prosecutorial purposes, they aid in determining the facts related to offenses such as thefts, fights and violations of school policies. Data relaying a decrease in such from year to year support this.

2. Remote button/buzzer system be installed for entry into buildings without a secure entrance

The district’s position, on the second recommendation above, is that a remote buzzer system is not the best approach for several reasons, one being that it would require a full time employee to operate. Instead, it recommends moving the entrances, as needed. Citizens wholeheartedly agrees. Although this may be addressed in the Feasibility Study the district has commissioned, Citizens continues to see the benefit of implementing this recommendation and the value of the temporary expense incurred. The uncertain timeline for creating these secure entrances propels our advocating for this temporary action to be undertaken. The specific buildings would then be able to monitor who is entering, and the purpose for their visit, before allowing entry, therefore ensuring that

(Continued on page 3)

(Act 1 Scene 2 continued from page 2)

There are some winners and losers in this tax shift. Those who would reap a benefit are:

- Senior Citizens with little or no earned income
- Homeowners with combined incomes less than \$104,000 - provided the rebate is \$942

Those who would pay more are:

- Renters
- Wage earners who do not pay property taxes (student workers, workers living at home or in another's home, etc.)
- Homeowners with combined incomes over \$104,000 - provided the rebate is \$942

A "No" vote keeps the school district portion of the earned income tax at 0.5%, (total EIT of 1.0%) and prevents the shifting of taxes. Senior citizens can still apply for the expanded Property Tax Rent Rebate, but property owners, regardless of age, who filed under the Homestead/Farmstead provision, will not get a rebate.

(Continued on page 13)

We Apologize!

The Citizens for Education Post Office Box was inadvertently closed in November of 2006. If you sent your membership during that time and it was either returned to you, or the check was not cashed, please resend your membership! A membership form is included in this newsletter. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

(School Safety task Force continued from page 2)

district visitor entry procedures are followed.

3. Every door to every classroom, including modulars, in our buildings be refitted with hardware enabling a lockdown, if necessary

Most district classrooms are able to be locked and all will be completed in the very near future. Beyond that, Citizens encourages that the three school buildings without the main office in close proximity to the main entrance be the district's top priority once any renovations commence.

4. That all doors around our school buildings be locked

In regards to all exterior doors being locked, the district asserts that not all doors can be locked. This continues to be a difference in philosophy. Perhaps with the final implementation of the above recommendations, and realizing their benefits, there can be some compromise or revelation to achieving this recommendation.

An additional recommendation of the SSTF was that all outside school doors be numbered. The numbering on all doors on the outside was completed but the equally important numbering of those doors on the inside remains incomplete. The target date for completion is by the new fiscal year.

The district remains on top of the safety issue by providing training and dialogue among the staff and contract service providers. The program "A Critical Incident: What to Do in the First 20 Minutes" has been presented to staff members district-wide and a survey of personnel followed, soliciting both feedback and suggestions. Realizing the importance of providing safe environments in our schools, Council Rock has been extremely proactive in moving this forward. Citizens would like to applaud their continuing focus on this critical issue. We will remain vigilant in monitoring the situation in the future.

Prevention Programs Help Provide Essential Tools for Good Choices

Today's youth face extreme pressures which interfere with coping skills and may misdirect a productive future for our children. Tragically, in recent weeks, Council Rock families and our school community have experienced this first hand.

In partnering with Council Rock, the Coalition for Healthy Youth (CHY) led by the efforts of Deb Moskovitz, Donna Foisy and others merged with the former district sanctioned Act 211 Committee. This organization has provided prevention programs for the district which are integrated into the curriculum. CHY, through writing and submitting grant proposals, has brought funding and programs that focus on nurturing the whole child and instilling the tools and positive behaviors necessary for future success. Their efforts expand into the community, as well, in advocating for a healthy and stable environment. They provide programs both for students in school as well as parental programs, some in conjunction with the student programs.

These programs are designed to be developmentally appropriate and are invaluable in addressing the critical issue of the ever increasing destructive behaviors our students engage in, not unlike communities throughout Bucks County and across the country.

These programs' expanse is experienced through all aspects of the school district. The Act 211 committee brought the implementation of the Parent-to-Parent program, a series that brings parents together using video instructional sessions addressing substance abuse. At the elementary level, CHY has brought in the Second Step program, presented in grades K-3. This program's goals are to change behaviors and attitudes that may contribute to aggressive and violent actions in children. The Second Step curricu-

lum teaches the same four skills in each grade level: Empathy, Impulse Control, Problem Solving and Anger Management. In grades 4-6, the Life Skills training program aims to reduce investigation and experimentation of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD).

On the secondary level, programs such as The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens provide teens with step-by-step instructions that enable them to set goals, manage time, resist peer pressure and work well with others. Also for the middle level student, Project Alert is a proven ATOD prevention program. Class Action, part of Project Northland, is a school-based alcohol prevention series aimed at reducing increased alcohol abuse and binge drinking, as well as changing the social norms surrounding alcohol use by high school students.

Other areas where CHY's efforts have been focused are a Homework Center, which utilizes a homework coach to provide one-on-one assistance in a local recreation facility, the Smoke-Free Playing Fields Project Class and others. CHY has had training for Across Ages, but, as yet, has not implemented it in the district. CHY provided training for co-pilot mentoring for teachers, supplied the 12,500 Red Ribbons for Red Ribbon Week and promoted community service on the Martin Luther King Day "Not a Day Off". CHY is utilizing both Creating Lasting Family Connections and Guiding Good Choices to also support parenting.

As important as instructional programs, CHY also provides funding for anonymous surveys to gather critical data from students. This data is used to develop important new programs for our school district.

The upcoming PA Youth Survey, scheduled to be distributed this September across grades 6, 8, 10 and 12, will gather critical data to assess trends and

(Continued on page 5)

(Prevention Programs continued from page 4)

reveal teen practices, views and dangerous behaviors.

It will also provide a comparison over time as it dovetails on previous surveys such as the Communities that Care survey given 10 years ago, and the previous PA Youth Survey administered in 2001 and 2003.

Council Rock has chosen to administer this survey requiring ACTIVE parental consent, meaning that parents must sign a form for their student to participate. A letter will be sent home as well as posted on the schools' E-Friday Folder link on the crsd.org website. Citizens encourages all parents to be alert to this distribution and provide consent for their student to participate, thus enabling the data to have a fair and accurate gauge of the issues. An accurate accounting and widespread participation is essential in gathering meaningful data to develop programs to help our youth.

Thanks to CHY there are many prevention programs in place and Citizens applauds their volunteer efforts. Unfortunately, many of these programs are not consistently used for a myriad of reasons, most importantly that many parents are not aware of them. Good kids make bad choices. Data has shown that as early as 6th grade, students in all segments of our community engage in risky behavior. It is important for parents, even those of elementary students, to have an ongoing dialogue with their students. Parents must learn to listen as much as they speak.

It is the responsibility of the entire community to equip our children with the tools necessary to make healthy choices in their lives. Prevention programs – when properly reinforced in the home and school – can surely make a difference.

Sink or Swim Time for Council Rock Pool

Council Rock North's Swimming Pool is one of the most utilized facilities in the School District. It is used six days a week all year long, continuously from 5:45 in the morning until 9:30 at night through most of the school year.

The opening of Council Rock South without a pool led to an architectural study to facilitate the continued and growing usage of the pool at Council Rock North. The study, dated October 2005, included seven (7) different options— from doing nothing to different levels of renovation at North to building a pool at South.

Over a year ago, a "Pool Committee" was formed to examine the options and make recommendations. The cost of each option was further refined at a December 20, 2006 Facilities Committee meeting.

On April 11, 2007, Mark Klein, Tom Schneider, and Bob Schoch met to discuss the options as presented to the Pool Committee. Option 6— which includes focusing on the pool at North and constructing a new, six-lane, 25-yard pool with ADA ramp and a new diving configuration—was discussed at the April 18, 2007 Facilities Committee Meeting.

Citizens for Education strongly encourages the community to support Council Rock North's Pool renovation. The renovation will:

- **make the pool ADA accessible**
- **correct the diving depth**
- **relocate the main drains so the filtration system will work more efficiently**
- **add deck space**
- **update support facilities (locker rooms, offices, storage).**

WHY IS THE POOL IMPORTANT?

The pool at Council Rock North has been a

(Continued on page 6)

(Sink or Swim continued from page 5)

teaching station, an extracurricular site and a community resource for the last 38 years. Since its inception, thousands upon thousands of students graduated from Council Rock meeting the swimming curriculum requirement. Each year, students add swimming or diving to their high school extracurricular resume, and the community takes advantage of the pool for fitness, swimming and diving lessons, lifeguard training, and family recreational activities.

Although small in numbers, most important is the pool's use for an adaptive aquatics program for students with special needs. Council Rock North students, as part of the physical education curriculum, make Special Education students who are bused to the high school feel comfortable in the pool while giving them instruction. Both populations meet an education prerequisite that gives them a benefit way beyond just filling a requirement.



WHY DOESN'T CR SOUTH HAVE A POOL?

On June 15, 1999, at a Special Meeting on the last day of school, Board Directors James DiDio, Chris Ayoub, Warren Hymson, Marilyn Larson, Robert Mellon, Dr. Janet Smith, Bruce Stamm, Cathy Triverio, and Daniel Worden voted for the components that would be included in the new high school. They voted unanimously to go forward with a pool—projected to cost \$1,650,000—as an “add-alternate”, so that a decision could be made after receiving bids. The District then entered into negotiations with the Northampton Board of Supervisors, which would include a pool for shared use in a proposed Community Center to be built adjacent to the new high school.

WHY DIDN'T NORTHAMPTON BUILD THE POOL NEXT TO COUNCIL ROCK SOUTH?

Northampton commissioned George J. Donovan A.I.A. Associates to draw up architectural plans for a Community Center next to CR South, which would include both a competitive and leisure pool. After a public outcry as to the large scope of the project, on December 5, 2001, the Board of Supervisors formed a “Community Center Advisory Committee” to review and make recommendations. Six months before South was to open, on March 11, 2002, that committee submitted a report that opposed the building of the pools. The Community Center was scaled back, the site was changed, and Council Rock was left without a second pool. It is now estimated that the pool at South would cost between \$4 and \$7 million—and, since the passage of Act 1, there is no longer a state reimbursement for “stadiums or natatoriums” (separate buildings containing swimming pools).

HOW IS ONE POOL ACCOMMODATING TWO HIGH SCHOOLS?

Only students at Council Rock North, not those at South, benefit from a wide-range of aquatic curriculum offerings, which include a 9th grade Physical Education requirement, appropriate level instruction, the chance to participate in the adaptive special education program described, and the opportunity to take lifeguard training as a Phys. Ed. curricular option. The one pool is shared by both North and South's four varsity teams; men's and women's swimming and diving.

The tightly scheduled use looks like this: The swim teams still practice in the morning every other day during the season. But instead of one team of men's on one day and one team of women's the other, South men's and women's teams come one day and North men and women on the other.

(Continued on page 7)

(Sink or Swim continued from page 6)

South swimmers arrive in time to change and be in the pool from 5:45 to 6:45 AM, and North's morning pool practice time is 6:00 to 7:00 AM. Morning practices are doubly as crowded, with as many as 10 swimmers doing laps in each lane. North swims after school and South's practices do not start until 4:00 PM when North is finished. Divers from both schools practice together at 5:30 PM. Swim meets last longer, finishing around 6:00 PM because they are no longer single sex men or women, only Double Dual (co-ed).

HOW IS ONE POOL ACCOMMODATING THE COMMUNITY?

The needs of two high schools for one pool have necessitated reducing the time offered to the community. The Council Rock Community Swimming and Diving Club—a part of the pool's programming since 1970 and a feeder program to both high schools—must be one hour later. Young swimmers and divers who aspire to someday be a part of the high school team now have a practice time that ends as late as 9:30 PM. Offerings of an historically full capacity children's swimming lesson program have also been reduced. Additionally, as the community grows, the demand greatly increases for both the Community children and adult swimming programs, yet the time and space has not since this pool was built in 1969.

WHAT SHAPE IS THE 38-YEAR-OLD POOL IN?

Any pool of this age needs continued and ongoing maintenance. The District has spent \$450,000 on the pool—including safety railing, tile repairs, crack patching, and stop-gapping drainage difficulties—as part of North's renovation. Just last December, the pool was closed for a week for a filtration problem. The architectural option commissioned by the Board with the lowest expenditure recommends tile and concrete repairs at a minimum, and any major renovation necessitates renovating the pool and locker

rooms up to Americans with Disabilities Act standards and bringing the diving depth up to the 2000 International Building Code.

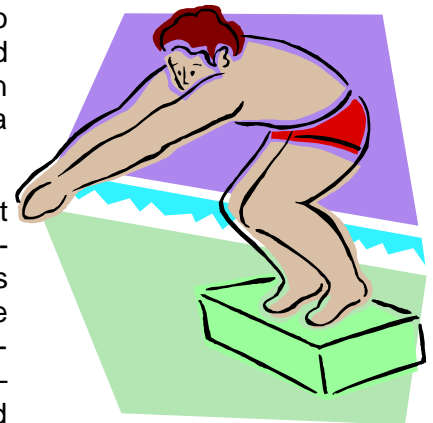
WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

A presentation recommending renovating Council Rock North's pool, and expanding the building housing it, is scheduled for the School Board meeting on May 3. A vote for the District to seek professional design services with a formal "Request for Proposal" is expected at the following May 17 meeting. The design services are expected to be between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

A preliminary timetable handed out at the April 18 Facilities meeting is projecting bidding for September 2007, with construction to start in January 2008. The pool is to be shut down in February, thereby using the Spring and Summer for construction, when the pool is not critically needed as a teaching station. The hope is to have the pool operational again by the second quarter of the 2008-09 school year. Very preliminary estimates put the cost at \$2 million.

Citizens for Education applauds the Administration for moving forward—and supports a decision to expend capital funds on the CR North pool, a facility the District owns and operates. Citizens encourages its readership to follow the developments so that, if necessary, they can lobby the decision makers to keep moving ahead in a timely way on what is already a tight schedule.

It is imperative that necessary renovations and the needs of those who use the pool are addressed **now** — and not pushed back into yet another school year.



Transitions

Transition for students can be a stressful time. From preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school and then to a post secondary school or a career, each new stage can be a time of mixed emotions. Students meet new friends, new teachers, and have to adjust to a new school environment or the outside world. A school transition program should include a variety of activities that provide students and parents with information about the new school, as well as provide students with social support during the transition, and bring the appropriate personnel together to understand curriculum and other requirements. The Council Rock School District realizes the importance of a smooth transition and has many plans in place to address the situation.

Elementary School: A "Hand in Hand" Transition

From the very beginning, starting in kindergarten, as well as for new students entering an elementary school at any grade level, new student orientations are in place to help students feel like they are part of the school community.

Parent meetings are held to help the parents become involved in their child's elementary school. Many opportunities and activities exist to make this transition a smooth one for the entire family. Throughout elementary school, there are events for students and families that continue to nurture and support school spirit and a sense of community, such as Field Day, school fairs, parent/child socials and more.



Middle School: The "Helping Hand" Transition

The transition between sixth and seventh grade begins with a handbook that outlines the curriculum requirements and a list of courses offered in the middle schools. Teacher recommendations, parent meetings with teachers and a curriculum meeting at the middle school to explain how teachers recommend students for their appropriate courses all help begin a smooth transition to middle school.

Students receive visits from middle school administrators and also tour the middle school building. During the tour students get to meet faculty, have a question and answer session and experience lunch in the middle school cafeteria. Some elementary schools are given a set of lockers for students to practice with and gain comfort. Faculty from the elementary schools and middle schools meet several times during the year to provide academic feedback to sixth grade teachers and discuss curriculum.

Summer mailings are sent out and the students are given their team assignment and can find out their homerooms. There is a summer orientation day where students can tour the school again, try their lockers and have an opportunity to spend a few hours with the kids on their team. Once school begins, students have many additional opportunities to meet and bond with each other in activities specifically planned to bring the team together, such as dances and team building days.

High School: The "Hand There If Needed" Transition

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade contains some similar programs as the middle school transition. Students in eighth grade are given handbooks with curriculum requirements and meet with their counselor to discuss the proper course work. Parents of future high school students are invited to attend a meeting at the high school where they are given information about curriculum and have a chance to meet with

(Continued on page 9)

(Transitions continued from page 8)

representatives of the curriculum areas and counselors. Council Rock High School North hosts a new parent orientation for incoming 9th grade parents and parents new to the district. The ninth grade principals and high school counselors go the middle schools to speak with the eighth graders.

The eighth graders are given a tour of the high school in May. Once at the high school, the new ninth graders are involved in the Fall Festival, Fall/Winter dance, Blue/White nights, a ninth grade dinner and many other social activities and clubs which will allow them to become involved in their new school. Ninth graders and their parents have a spring meeting with their counselor to map out curriculum options for the remaining years of high school, and begin a preliminary discussion about post-secondary school goals, which can include the beginnings of the college process.

In spite of all these programs and activities in place, the school district feels more is needed to help this middle-to-high school transition. To this end, new in-service days will be added to the calendar next year to allow for more discussions concerning the transition between the eighth and ninth grade teachers. In February of this year, a survey was given to all students in both high schools to assess how they felt about their transition from the middle level into the high school. The findings will be evaluated to determine if there are areas of weakness or in need of attention.

Other projects being considered are a service project for ninth graders, the addition of school orientations for students coming in from other schools or districts, the addition of a ninth grade/new parent night at Council Rock High School South, a ninth grade mentoring program (currently being piloted at North) and holding ninth grade pic-

nics/dinners/dances in the beginning of the year. The transition of Richboro Middle School students who split between the two high schools will also be looked into and discussed.

Beyond High School: The "Real Life" Transition

The last transition for our students involves the transition into a post secondary school or the job market. Council Rock provides a college fair and career night for students to help them gather information about colleges/universities or professions/careers that may be of interest. Juniors and seniors meet with counselors about their future. In the summer before senior year a packet is mailed to students containing transcript request forms, examples of resumes and unofficial transcripts to check for accuracy. In the fall of their senior year, students make appointments with their counselor to make sure they are prepared to apply to the schools of their choice. Juniors and seniors have access to college visitations during the school day. Assemblies presented to juniors and seniors advise them on what is needed to apply for college. The district is giving consideration to administering a survey to alumni to assess how well Council Rock prepared them for college and/or a career after high school.

The district realizes the importance of smooth transitions and is trying to get information from different sources to create programs to help all students, at each level, to feel comfortable and safe in their school environment, and to achieve success.



Vote for
Vote for
Vote for
Vote for
Kids Kids Kids Kids Sake!

Middle Level Reading Update: New Tools Added as Program Continues to Evolve

Two years ago, Citizens for Education reviewed and evaluated the Middle Level Reading Program. At that time, the new, five day a week reading course was three years old and was described as a “work in progress.” Citizens for Education has revisited the 7th and 8th grade reading program, to see what changes and improvements have been made.

There is one course framework between English and Reading classes, under the RELA (Reading/English/Language Arts) umbrella. The English and Reading teachers work in concert with one another. There are three areas that both subjects cover: reading, writing skills, and research. Because the middle schools work in teams covering all subjects, the teachers can ensure that what isn't covered in one class will be covered in the other. Literacy is approached as an entire school concept, with reading stressed in all the core subject areas.

Some of the issues that Citizens wanted to revisit included assessment tools, new curriculum additions, and how differentiation is addressed in the Reading classrooms and within the English Department as a whole.

Assessment

As a result of the previous evaluation, the primary concern was the lack of an assessment tool to determine the success of the reading program. A standardized assessment, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test 4th Edition (SDRT) had been given, but was dropped without a replacement.

As of the 2005 school year, a District-wide assessment, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) has been implemented. It is an

online, interactive assessment, given to all 7th and 8th graders in the Skills for Success class, and 9th to 11th grade students in the Foundations of English classes. The assessment is administered at the beginning, the middle, and end of the school year—and is norm referenced. It is tailored to adapt to the individual student; depending on the student's response to a question—correct or incorrect—the next question is determined, and so on. At this time, Citizens has not had an opportunity to review the results at any level, but were told that the District is seeing an improvement in scores from beginning to end of the school year.

In comparing the efficacy of the Reading program, it was reported that there are less students below proficient in 8th grade than in 5th when comparing cohort groups (same students) from 5th to 8th grade. However, most students from Skills in grade 7 move to Skills in grade 8. From the 04-05 school year to the 05-06 school year, approximately 8% of students in Literacy for Learning, in grade 7, moved to the Skills for Success class in 8th grade. The percentage of students moving from Literacy for Learning to Skills the following year was only approximately 1.5%. This trend, should it continue, would seem to signify that those students in the Literacy for Learning and Skills for Success classes are more appropriately placed.

Citizens commends the District for facilitating communication between the 6th and 7th grade teachers, allowing for better placement. However, it is difficult to attribute this trend to the effectiveness of the Literacy for Learning classes, as we have not received any SRI data. As this becomes available, it will be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of both the Literacy for Learning and Skills for Success programs. If the data shows an increase in reading levels from the start to end of the school year, presumably this would signify that these programs are effective.

(Continued on page 11)

(Middle Level Reading continued from page 10)

New Curriculum Additions

Grammar

Beginning in 2006-2007, a grammar component was added to the English curriculum at all grade levels. This was accomplished through the literacy specialists at the Elementary level and through the RELA curriculum coordinator, Sheryl Kreps, at the secondary level. The program is still in draft stage—and encompasses grammar, usage, mechanics and spelling, applied to both written and oral composition. One of the positive aspects of this addition is that there is a logical flow of learning concepts from one grade to the next. As the draft states, “Although students will learn these skills at different developmental levels, this scope and sequence establishes targeted and expected levels of achievement.” Presumably, all the 7th grade English and Reading teachers at all of the schools will be on the same page when teaching these grammar concepts.

Study of Non-Fiction

The same reading list is used by all three middle schools to keep continuity across the curriculum. Non-fiction has also begun to play a more important part of the RELA curriculum. This was done in part because our students were having trouble with the non-fiction piece of the PSSA test. Expectations on the part of the teachers has improved, raising the bar and better preparing students for the next level.

Study Skills Component

Due to concerns expressed by the 9th grade teachers with students’ organizational and study skills, a study skills component was added to the Reading program.

Newtown and Holland Middle School teachers use a textbook from English, Sci-

ence, etc. to teach students how to study from a text. They use the 5 stage “SQ3R” technique to accomplish this:

- **Survey** - Scan the table of contents, introduction, chapter introductions and chapter summaries to pick up a general overview of the text.
- **Question** - Make a note of any questions on the subject, or that are of particular interest. These questions can be considered similar to study goals.
- **Read** - Now read the document. Read through useful sections in detail, developing an understanding of all the points that are relevant. While reading, take notes.
- **Recall** – Mentally go over the document, isolating main facts, to see how other information fits in.
- **Review** - Review by re-reading the document, by expanding notes, or by discussing the material with someone.

This is a useful technique for extracting the most from time spent reading a textbook, organizing the subject in the reader’s mind, setting study goals and separating important information from irrelevant data. It improves the *quality* of study time.

Richboro Middle School does not do this in as much depth—focusing on the survey portion—to set a purpose for reading that builds background knowledge.

Differentiation

There are only two levels of reading classes in the middle schools, and students who may be reading far beyond grade level can be sitting next to a student who is just at grade level. Citizens spoke with reading teachers from the middle schools, to find out, first hand, how teachers in the classroom differentiate among students.

We found that teachers have been inserviced specifically on differentiation. They have learned from Rick Wormley, long considered the “guru” on differentiation. All stu-

(Continued on page 12)

(Middle Level Reading continued from page 11)

dents learn from the same lesson plan, and then often work in smaller groups at their own pace. However, the small groups are not always homogenous. Sometimes the group is mixed, and the more advanced student may learn by helping the struggling, or less advanced student. Parts of the course framework are designed for individuals to go at their own pace. The self selected reading books are unique to the reading level of the individual.

Generally, in the Reading class, students are taught a literary device expressed in the 8-10 short stories and 4 novels read during the year. Then they divide into small groups. They write in journals using this literary device as well as applying what they have learned to their self-selected reading. There are generally 15 "journal writes" per year and are in the standard five-paragraph format. Students are expected to read a significant amount on their own through their self-selected reading books. Teachers encourage students to pick these books based on the student's ability; therefore, no specific number of books is required. This process allows students with differing ability levels to apply the same concepts.

TeenBiz, a new initiative to address differentiation, was introduced into the middle level RELA program in 2006 (piloted at Richboro Middle School in 2005), and in special education at the high schools. Students are given a pre-test to determine reading levels. Then they read a current events article tailored to their individual reading ability. Questions are posed, again at different developmental levels, and students respond accordingly. It is done completely online twice a week, either during Reading or at Resource/Activity period. This allows students at varying levels to discuss the same written piece of work.

Teachers Helping Teachers

Effective teaching cannot occur in a vacuum. Council Rock teachers use an "intranet" system to share ideas and strategies that work. Teachers can log on and see what others are doing in the same subject areas, and can also post ideas of their own. Instead of spending time reinventing the wheel, this allows teachers to concentrate on what is best for their students and classes and learn from each other's success.

Citizens for Education is pleased that a Reading assessment tool is in place, although no data was provided regarding the first year of implementation, and the Reading core curricular area continues to evolve. Citizens hopes that the three middle schools work in concert to achieve continuous improvement in all areas of the RELA program—and will continue to inform our readership on this important component of the Middle Level.

Citizens for Education Officers 2006-07

President Allison MacGahan

Vice-President Denise Brooks

Treasurer Wendi Thomas

Secretary Sue Maseda



Citizens
for
Education

...a voice for our children!

(Act 1 Scene 2 continued from page 3)

The following table lists reasons for voting for or against the ballot question.

Vote YES if	Vote NO if
You are a Senior Citizen with little or no earned income	You want to send a message to the State Legislature to develop a better funding formula for education and REAL property tax relief
You are a homeowner(s) with combined income under \$104,000 (based on \$942 rebate – this figure would be lower if there is a lower rebate)	You are a homeowner(s) with combined income over \$104,000 (based on \$942 rebate – this figure would be lower if there is a lower rebate)
	You are a wage earner that does not pay property taxes and would not receive a rebate (i.e. other household members including teenagers, young adults, etc.)
	You are a Renter

While the tax shift is revenue neutral, Council Rock foresees the possibility for cash flow problems as the property tax relief is given before the EIT is actually collected. The amount of tax relief is a **projected calculation** based on the **expected** additional revenue - if the voters say yes to the additional .9% earned income tax, divided by the number of properties for which a Homestead/Farmstead application is on file. Therefore there is a possibility of falling short in EIT collections. Any revenue shortfall can be made up the following year, but would have an impact on the current budget.

Voters will ultimately decide whether to approve the ballot question, and resulting .9% increase in the earned income tax, or to **keep the status quo by voting the ballot question down**, sending a message that the residents of Council Rock want real property tax relief. **Please VOTE!**

Citizens for Education Membership Form

Membership funds enable us to produce our newsletter, inform on and advocate for quality public education!

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Address: _____

E-mail Address (please print clearly): _____

Indicate your preference for receipt of our newsletter ___ mail ___ E-mail

Please send a check, made payable to “Citizens for Education”, for the total amount chosen to:

Citizens for Education
 PO Box 1301
 Newtown PA 18940

- 3 Years for \$25.00 (or 1 year for \$10.00) *
- Additional Donation (indicate amount) _____

Circle one:

New Member

Renewal

*Joining now entitles you to membership through October 2010 (3 year membership), or October 2008 (1 year membership). Membership entitles you to receive our newsletter published semi-annually and voting privileges at our general membership yearly planning meeting, held in the fall.



What's In This Issue Is Important to YOU



- **Act 1 Scene 21**
- **School Safety Task Force Recommendations -
Where are we now?1**
- **Prevention Programs Help Provide Essential Tools for Good Choices4**
- **Sink or Swim Time for Council Rock Pool5**
- **Transitions8**
- **Middle Level Reading Update: New Tools Added as Program Continues to Evolve10**
- **Citizens for Education Membership Form13**

C4E can be contacted via email at
Citizens4Ed@yahoo.com