



Bus Stop Conversations

Neighboring news about the Washington Central Supervisory Union schools of Berlin, Calais, Doty Memorial (Worcester), East Montpelier, Rumney Memorial (Middlesex), & U-32.

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Vol. 18, #10

February 17, 2010

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Aly Johnson-Kurts and Fiona Moseley prepare to debate at Woodstock High School during a recent debate tournament.



U-32 entered two strong teams in Norwich University's annual bridge truss competition. RB Johnson, Jordan Black-Deegan, and Dan Thompson's bridge weighed less than one pound and held over 60 lbs. before breaking!



The bridge built by Matt Connor, Zac Wunrow, John Gardner-Morse, and Mitch Ferrada weighed just over two pounds, and held over 160 pounds. Both bridges are on display in the U-32 front office for public viewing. Check them out!



WCSU National Board Certified Teachers at a planning retreat with Superintendent, Robbe Brook and Curriculum Director, Carole Freeman.

The U-32 Debate Team

By Charlie Catlin

Parents, be forewarned! The U-32 debate team offers your child an opportunity to learn how to think logically, construct factually based arguments, see both sides of an issue, use multiple resources for gathering factual information, rely on teamwork to achieve a shared goal, and speak clearly and confidently. You may never win an argument again if your child joins the U-32 Debate Team.

On Friday, February 5, U-32 hosted The Vermont Public Forum State Debate Tournament, the purpose of which was to choose the teams to participate in the Vermont State Final on Monday, February 8th. Bill Haines and Paula Emery are the coaches of the U-32 team and to write this article, they encouraged

me to attend the "playoffs." Before I knew it, I was sitting behind a desk and judging one of the debates.

Starting at 5:00 p.m., looking around the

U-32 cafeteria I began to learn about and get totally taken by this amazing competition. The students, representing ten schools from around the state, started arriving with dry cleaner bags containing their clean shirts, skirts, jackets and



Sean Sinclair, Aly Johnson-Kurts, Luke LaRosa and Fiona Moseley prepare to debate during a recent tournament. Other members of the U-32 Debate Team, not pictured: Zack Weinert and Arianna Goarin

ties over their arms and backpacks full of notes and snacks on their shoulders. Females and males seemed equally represented, and the debate partners could be either mixed or same sex. The scene reminded me of a locker room before a game or back stage before a concert or a play: high energy, some tension, lots of camaraderie and last minute visualizing and rehearsing.

U-32 was represented by two teams comprised of Fiona Moseley with Aly Johnson-

Kurts and Sean Sinclair with Luke LaRosa. Zack Weinert and Arianna Goarin are regular members of the team but did not participate in this debate.

[see debate on page 3](#)

Common Level of Appraisal and other Mysteries of School Funding

By Ginny Burley

Town Meeting Day is right around the corner, so it's time for an update on school funding and what we need to pay attention to in 2010, one of the most challenging years in recent history.

Your school property tax: Your school property tax is a factor of four influences: the statewide tax rate, school budget(s), equalized pupils, and the CLA, or Common Level of Appraisal, which equalizes property values across the state in order to make the statewide property tax fair.

This system, created under Acts 60 and 68, is designed to treat taxpayers and students in all Vermont towns fairly. Towns have equal ability to raise funds. The majority of taxpayers pay school taxes based on their income. Here's how it works:

The statewide property tax: Under Act 68, the statewide property tax is \$1.10

for residential property – your home - and \$1.59 for non-residential property (businesses and second homes.) This rate is on each \$100 of the property's fair market value. When applied to all property statewide, this should raise enough to provide a basic education payment of \$8544 for every equalized student* in the state. When there is a surplus in the education fund, the state may drop the statewide tax rate – as they did last year, to \$.86 and \$1.35. For 2011, the Tax Commissioner has recommended an additional two-cent increase in that statewide property tax rate.

The school budget: It takes more than \$8544 to educate a student; how *much* more is what school boards wrestle with as they set their budgets. When the school budget is final, the state tax rate for residential property is adjusted to locally raise taxes for spending above the basic education spending amount. The residential tax rate adjustments reflect both the U-32 and elementary school budgets. The non-residential tax rate is fixed and is not changed by the school budget. However, *both* rates are changed by the Common Level of Appraisal.

The Common Level of Appraisal: So far, we have seen that the statewide property tax rate

[see funding on page 3](#)

Board Meetings

U-32: first and third Wednesday, 6 p.m., February 17, March 3;
 Berlin Elementary School: second Monday, 6:15 p.m., March 8;
 Calais Elementary School: third Tuesday, 6:15 p.m., February 16;
 Doty Elementary School, Worcester: third Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. February 16;
 East Montpelier Elementary School: third Monday, 6:30 p.m., March 15;
 Rumney Elementary School, Middlesex: first Tuesday, 6:00 p.m., March 9;
 Washington Central Supervisory Union Executive Committee: February 17, 6:30 p.m. at U-32.

You can view current and past issues of Bus Stop on the web at www.u32.org

Click on the newsletter link on the left of the page, then click on Bus Stop Conversations.

February 22-March 2: Winter Vacation

Activities

U-32

February 18: Pops Concert, 7:00 p.m.
 February 18, 19: Winter Adventures with Lotus Lake, seventh grade
 February 27-March 7: Ice Hockey field trip to Sweden and Iceland
 March 1: Annual Budget Informational Meeting, 6 p.m.
 March 5: Middle School St. Patrick's Day Dance
 March 11: Sixth Grade Parent Information Night, 6:30 p.m.
 March 11: Middle School Parent Teacher Council, 6:30
 March 12 and 13: Variety Show

Berlin

February 17: PTNA meeting, 6:30 p.m.
 February 19: Winter Adventure, 1-3 p.m.

Calais

February 17: Morning Meeting, 9:00 a.m., topic: anti-bullying; students wrote their own song called, "Don't Laugh at Me"
 February 19: Ceremony of Giving
 March 9: PTO meeting, 6:30 p.m.

Doty

February 18: School Report Night
 February 19: Winter Carnival Day

East Montpelier

February 17: Mini Museum-Celebration of Learning, 6:30 p.m.
 March 25: Pops Concert & Fine Arts Museum

Rumney

February 18: PTO meeting, 4 p.m.
 February 19: Winter Carnival
 March 15: 3/4 Grade Field Trip to the Flynn
 March 17: All School Meeting: 2:40 - 3:20 p.m.
 March 18: PTO meeting, 6:30 p.m.
 March 27: All-You-Can-Eat Pie Breakfast, 9 - 11 a.m.

Surviving Adolescence: Simple Ways to Understand and Help Teens and Pre-Teens with the popular Michael Nerney
Tuesday, March 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Montpelier High School Auditorium
 Come Learn:

- How the teen brain works
- Why teens do what they do
- Better ways to talk to and listen to teens
- How you can help protect teens from drugs and alcohol

Information: Ivy Zeller, izeller@myfairpoint.net, 223-4949.

Save the Date!
 Spaghetti Dinner Evening at U-32
 Washington DC Fundraiser
 Friday, March 26, 2010

Board Minutes

Rumney, January 12, 2010

- ◆ Adam Rosen reported the indoor air quality is good and cleaning of the heating units has resulted in improved efficiency. He recommended a service contract with Vermont Heating and Ventilating.
- ◆ Rosen reported on the writing program, improvement in writing scores, and showed samples.
- ◆ Jen Donovan presented for the Spanish program that included audio and video clips of student work.
- ◆ Discussed the budget draft #3 and changes.
- ◆ Discussed the process for hiring a new teacher.
- ◆ Approved the final budget for 2010-11.
- ◆ Approved the Warning for Town Meeting.
- ◆ Doty School Board members will be invited to the February 2nd meeting for VSBA Phase I planning.

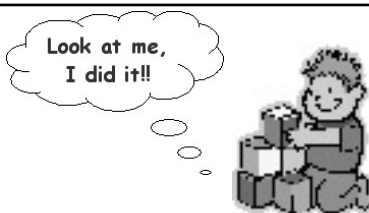
U-32, January 20, 2010

- ◆ Ginny Burley welcomed Representatives Tony Klein, Janet Ancel, Peter Peltz and Pat

From Hilda Hooper, Doty and Berlin Spanish teacher:

Spanish Proverb of the Week

Dime con quiénes andas, y te diré quién eres.
 Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.



The Washington Central Supervisory Union is conducting a **play-based screening for young children who are 3 and 4 years old** (3 years old as of September 1, 2010) and live in the towns of Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, or Worcester.

Screening will take place during the week of **March 29, 2010.**

If you are interested in learning more about your child's overall growth and development please call your local elementary school to set up an appointment.

The Washington Central Supervisory Union offers public, part-time pre-kindergarten programs in each of its elementary schools. If your child is 3 or 4 years old (3 years old as of September 1, 2010), then your child is eligible to participate. 2010-2011 pre-kindergarten registration packets are available at your local elementary school.

Please contact Jennifer Miller-Arsenault, Early Education Coordinator, at 223-2796 ext. 352 if you have any questions.

McDonald and Senators Ann Cummings, and Bill Doyle and led a discussion on education issues.

- ◆ Robbe Brook announced an open house at the WCSU office on Jan. 28th.
- ◆ Adrienne Magida reported for the curriculum committee on the Latin system for ranking students and implementation of the new GPA standards.
- ◆ Caitlyn Couture asked about the U-Band schedule.
- ◆ Keith Gerritt reported on the start of the semester and discussion of the on-going collaboration between elementary and middle schools.
- ◆ Approved adoption of the Honor Roll Policy.
- ◆ Set the Tuition rate for 2010-11.
- ◆ Approved a request for a tuition waiver.
- ◆ Approved winter coaches as presented.
- ◆ Appointed John Ostler, Academic Coordinator-White Table and Allison Farber, Paraeducator. ◆

Concert Fundraiser:

Sunday, April 11, 6:00—7:30 pm

Worcester Town Hall

We've put together a band to play some cover tunes, and provide some mud season relief. The money will fund an **Artists in Residence** program at Doty Elementary, for all the students to enjoy.

The Band-mates: Ben Larrow (Kindergarten teacher) on banjo, Chad Hollister (Riley's dad) on guitar and vocals, Carter Stowell (Elvin's dad) on drums, & Tom Sabo (Max and Greta's dad) on bass.

Vocalists: Leslie Sabo, Chani Waterhouse (Elvin's mom), Christa Lang (Gavin and Spencer's mom).

\$5 per person or \$15 per family

Get ready to get your groove on!

A message from Central Vermont New Directions Coalition:

More young people resist substance use when there are opportunities for meaningful involvement in their community.

School Budget Informational Meetings:

Berlin:

Monday, March 1, 7:00 p.m. at BES

East Montpelier

Saturday, February 27, 9:30 a.m. at EMES

Rumney

Wednesday, February 17, 6:30 p.m. at the Middlesex Town Hall

Monday, March 1, 6:30 p.m. at Rumney

U-32

Monday, March 1, 6:00 p.m. at U-32

Bus Stop Conversations is published 16 times in the school year by Washington Central Friends of Education, Inc., a private, non-profit corporation committed to strengthening the communication and cooperation between residents of the five district towns of Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, and Worcester, and the Washington Central Supervisory Union schools. No tax money is used for the production or publication. Send correspondence to: Editor, Deborah Wolf, Washington Central Friends of Education, PO Box 324, Montpelier, VT 05601; e-mail: dwolf@u32.org

funding from pg. 1

raises enough to cover the basic education payment, and the local adjustment raises enough to cover the rest of the school budget. This combination of state and local tax rates works as long as all the property in the state is being taxed at 100% of its value.

Here's how that works: If your \$100,000 house is taxed at \$1.05 per \$100, it will raise \$1,050 in taxes. But what if your cousin's identical \$100,000 house in another town is only appraised at \$75,000? If the same \$1.05 tax rate is used, your cousin will only pay \$787.50. This is unfair.

To deal with the inequity of differing appraisals from town to town, the state comes up with a formula for each town that compares its appraisals to 100% of the fair market value – what your home **is actually worth**. This is the CLA; it represents the gap between appraised value and actual value. Instead of changing the appraisals the formula changes the town's tax rate. Think of that \$100,000 (fair market value) house again. If it's appraised at \$150,000, the tax rate is reduced to still raise the same \$1,050. If it's appraised at \$100,000, the tax rate stays steady at \$1.05. If it is appraised at \$75,000, the tax rate is increased to still raise the \$1,050 on that house. This CLA formula is applied to both the residential and non-residential property tax rates; so **all education taxes are affected by the CLA**.

Why CLA matters: When property values rise rapidly, the appraisals quickly fall behind the actual values, and the CLA drops from year to year. A small drop means a small increase in the tax rate; a big drop means a big change. When a town conducts a new appraisal, the CLA jumps up, often going above 100%. After that, as long as property values continue to rise, the CLA will continue to drop. In the past year, WCSU towns' CLA changed: Berlin from 104.5 to 102.6; Calais from 96.6 to 97.1; East Montpelier from 102 to 98.8; Middlesex from 73.7 to 74.1; and Worcester from 106.2 to 102. When the CLA drops, the tax rates rise so that the properties continue to generate the needed revenue. You would pay the same amount of tax if your house were appraised at 100% with a low tax rate as you do when your house is appraised at 75% with a higher tax rate. It's a balance. **It helps to think about the dollar amount of tax rather than the tax rate.**

Putting it all together: With this year's CLA adjustment, projected residential tax rate increases are as follows (includes U-32 and respective elementary school budgets as proposed): Berlin 5¢; Calais 0¢; E. Montpelier 8¢, Middlesex 6¢, and Worcester 6¢. Without the CLA, the school budgets would have the following impact: Berlin 0¢; Calais 2¢ **decrease**; E. Montpelier 1¢, Middlesex 3¢, and Worcester 3¢ **decrease**. You can see how much property values, not just school budgets, affect the taxes.

A note on recent events: The six school boards have worked on budgets for months, going through them line by line and person by person, and creating responsible budgets.

The last but very important part of the equation is the income protection in Act 68. More than 60% of the residents in our five towns do not earn above \$90,000 in adjusted household income and so do not need to pay the full amount of the education tax. Make sure that you apply for any homestead tax adjustment. Please help your relatives, friends and neighbors apply for adjustments if they are eligible. Even if you didn't receive one

debate from pg. 1

These pairs, for the most part, work together for the year, in order to learn how to best compliment each other's knowledge and skill. Schools often have several teams of two students. There are currently 20-30 teams statewide, from about twelve different schools, which participate in the competitions.

I had interviewed Aly by phone earlier in the week, which was good, since the evening of the debate was no time to distract her from what she was there to do. She told me her neighbor, Bill Haines, came to her with the idea of starting a debate team at U-32. The team and coaches meet Thursday afternoons, and every Saturday across the state there is a debate. The resolution changes monthly and is determined by the National Forensic League, so just when you're getting really familiar with your information, the topic changes. Aly's favorite Resolution so far was "Resolved: President Obama's plan for increasing troops in Afghanistan is in the best interests of the United States."

Aly wants to go into politics. When she was in eighth grade she was a legislative page at the statehouse in Montpelier. She has applied to go to Washington as a Senate page. As she explained, "You have to stay open and impartial and focus on the evidence because you have to come prepared to argue either side of the Resolution. You have to adapt your speech on the fly based on what the other team uses for evidence and the points they're trying to make."

The Resolution being debated this month states "Resolved: In the United States, organized political lobbying does more harm than good." When the two teams of two arrive at their as-

***Equalized students**, or when is a student NOT a student? A school does not get \$8544 for every student body in the classroom. Say you get a point for each student. You get extra points for high school students, for state-placed students, for students who do not speak English, for low income students, and for various other categories. You even get extra points for not having ENOUGH students, if the decline in enrollment is so fast that the lack of revenue would make it impossible to run your school. The state adds up all the points, divides it by the number of actual students, and gives each school a number of *equalized* students which may or may not bear any resemblance to the number of *actual* students! The school then gets basic education funding for each *equalized* student. This same number is used to calculate the *per-pupil expense*, which is even more important these days than the total school budget. This is why declining enrollment is such a problem: when the school's budget is divided among fewer pupils, the per-pupil cost goes up, and that affects the tax rate. Stay tuned!

in the past, it is worth applying for, because as the tax rates and income limits change, so does the eligibility. The tax department has a substantial outreach program to reach eligible citizens. If you have any questions, call the tax department at 828-2865. If you are eligible, the tax adjustment shows up right on your tax bill. ❖



Executive Branch Members of the U-32 Pinnacle Core's Model Government await the conclusion of the debate over a Wind Power Bill in the Statehouse on December 23. The conclusion of the Model Government always takes place at the Statehouse where President Austin McEathron (center) eventually signed two bills into law. He was helped by (left to right) Secretary of Energy Sam Merriman, Vice President Emily George, and Secretary of Health and Human Services, Michael Hoffert.

signed room with their judge, a coin is tossed and the winner gets to choose which side of the resolution they want to represent. In most competitions it's not that big of a deal to have to defend one goal or the other, but not knowing which side of the resolution you will be defending until right before you start seems ... hard!

Not only that, but in at least one of your next two debates that night, based on a coin toss, you could be expected to argue for the other position.

Attending High School events is a part of our local culture. If you like to attend the concerts, plays, and sports, let me suggest you add another event to your list, debate!

Afterward: **Congratulations to U-32's Luke LaRosa who won the 3rd Speaker Award at the State Forum.** ❖



Community Connections Coordinator Paul Dayton, works at the "Haiti Relief Table" in the U-32 atrium.

All You Can Eat Pie Breakfast

On March 27, from 9:00-11:00 or (until they run out), Middlesex will host our first All You Can Eat Pie Breakfast. We are hoping for a fun morning of pie eating (both sweet and savory) and mud season fellowship with friends and neighbors. To benefit the Rumney School PTO and the Middlesex Band Concert Series.

We need a total of 200 pies to make this event a success. Please call Wendy Farber at 229-4798 if you can help.

Community Connections

Winter Break Day Camps for both elementary and middle/high school kids; lots of exciting activities.

Check it out at:

www.communityconnections.us