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Write-in makes late entry into School Board race

By JANE FORD-STEWART

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Debbie Frensz Taran of 5170 N. Bay Ridge Ave. is making a last-minute, write-in bid for the Whitefish Bay School Board, challenging two incumbents in the Tuesday, April 1, election.

She will run against Marie Greco, 5400 N. Lake Drive, and James Phillips, 4930 N. Woodburn St., both of whom are seeking their second terms.

The three candidates are vying for two at-large seats.

Debbie Frensz Taran

Frensz Taran her husband have lived in Whitefish Bay for 18 years, and their two children have received an excellent education in the Whitefish Bay schools, Frensz Taran said. She has one child still in high school. She said she wants to be on the board to be an independent voice and to make people feel listened to.

The schools are contemplating whether to hold a referendum seeking to borrow \$14 million or \$26 million for building maintenance and improvement.

"That's a huge referendum," Frensz Taran said, and many questions must be asked.

But her main reason for running, she said, is to add diversity to the board. The schools are focused too much on getting children into college and not enough on making sure every child gets a good start, she said. She herself knows of two Whitefish Bay families that have children who did not graduate.

"There is something wrong when a community focused on children can't get its children to graduate. I think it's sad," she said.

Also, she said, the focus is too much on college.

"I don't think there is a place for people who say they want to go to Waukesha Tech," she said.

The independent course is not new to her, Frensz Taran said. She set up Kenosha County's first 911 dispatch service, she said. She also was the first woman member of the Duluth Police Department, serving as a dispatcher, she said.

Marie Greco

Greco said she too favors the go-slow approach to the proposed capital improvement referendums.

"It's important to do something thoughtful," with input from the community, families and students, she said. That she feels community views are vital is reflected in her former service as a PTO president and a member of the Advocates for Education, a community advocacy group, she said.

Greco is married and two of her four children are still in the system.

The district clearly has aging buildings, she said.

"It's important to keep the facilities up to date to maintain the reputation of fabulous schools, so people will want to continue to move into Whitefish Bay," Greco said.

Another major issue with which the School Board must wrestle is painful budget cuts due to declining enrollment.

"We have to continue to manage budget cuts as enrollment projections show continued enrollment decline," she said.

Her background in management as co-owner of a business for 20 years has been an asset in helping make those critical budget decisions, Greco said.

James Phillips

Phillips, also a former Advocates for Education board member, acknowledged that the board must give time and attention to the facilities issues involved in the proposed referendums, but, he said, "The core is what happens inside the walls."

And one of his key initiatives is to encourage student engagement at all levels, getting students engaged in sports and activities, and encouraging relationships with teachers.

"Performance is tied directly to engagement," he said.

The district is already working on that, Phillips said, but perhaps it could be bumped up another notch by offering classes that capture students' attention and imagination by delving deeply into subjects. That would not only encourage engagement, but make it easier to teach critical thinking, a skill that will serve students for a lifetime, he said.

Phillips also said he would improve the quality of feedback to students on performance and encourage them to reflect on their own performance and progress as another way to get them engaged.

Another major issue for him is making the schools a place that inspires teachers and administrators. He said he would like to give teachers more opportunities to collaborate, have them provided with more, quality feedback, and train them in self reflection, he said.

School Board members receive \$1,200 annually.

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