

# Board win: just a beginning

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

For Thomas McConnell and Joseph Miller, winning Monday's Walled Lake school board race is only the beginning.

Both McConnell — the incumbent who topped five candidates with 648 votes — and runner-up challenger Miller (485 votes) know what lies ahead.

Tentatively slated for late September or October is another bond proposal, this one to enhance existing facilities and build some new ones to help the district deal with rapid enrollment growth. Because it closely follows last October's debacle — the public's defeat of a \$135.5-million bond proposal — the school board will be under much closer scrutiny.

The victorious candidates know it.

The first and foremost thing on the agenda is to get out and explain to the people exactly what's happening with the bond issue," said the 34-year-old McConnell around 9:30 p.m. Monday, with eight of nine precincts counted and victory apparent.

Only 1,111 out of approximately 44,000 registered voters (about 2.5 percent) either voted at the nine precincts or by way of absentee ballot. McConnell and Miller led the field, followed by challengers Cathy Phillips (311 votes), David Dewar (276 votes) and Steven Kennelly (251 votes).

McConnell, who was appointed

to a one-year term in July 1992 and then re-elected to another one-year stint last June, said the board "learned a couple things" from the defeat of the last bond proposal.

Details about this year's proposal, expected to be lower than \$100 million, might be hammered out at the Thursday, June 23, school board meeting, said board president David Plummer.

"We learned that, as much as we did to get the word out, people were looking for more specific information," McConnell said, adding he intends to work hard to make that happen.

The incumbent said his victory, meanwhile, indicated to him that what he's "doing and saying is on the right track."

According to the 31-year-old Miller, who has been active this year in bringing improvements to Glengary Elementary School (where his son is a student), keeping the bond proposal cost as low as possible is a top priority.

Not overdoing aesthetics when building new schools or improving existing ones could be a way to do so, he said.

"I'm well aware the older schools need work," Miller said. "I'm a firm believer in getting (physical) equity in all the buildings, a new standard. The new buildings they've built are beautiful. But I don't think we need to spend that much money. I don't see how that benefits students."

## WALLED LAKE

Miller also said he wouldn't have a problem confusing issues at the school district he works for (Willow Run) with the one he'll represent as a board member. "I'll definitely separate the two."

Spreading bond proposal money across the district would be music to the ears of residents such as Mark and Claudia Clancy, who live in the area of the aging Wixom Elementary School.

"There are a lot of people in this area who have felt we are not getting representation on the board," said Mark Clancy shortly before polls closed outside Wixom Elementary (Precinct 4). "All the money seems to be pouring out to the east."

That was a reference to sparkling schools built in recent years, including Walled Lake Middle School on Pontiac Trail.

"Look at the school you're standing in front of right now," he said. "It's terribly old, and even in their next projected millage there's no money to replace" it.

Clancy said he voted for two of the three Wixom-based challengers (Dewar, Kennelly, Phillips). He wouldn't say which ones.

After conceding defeat at the district's Ladd Road election headquarters and shaking the hands of his opponents, Dewar shrugged off the notion that too many Wixom candidates weakened any of their chances.

"I wasn't running for Wixom or speaking for that area," Dewar said. "I consider (that) a school board person represents the whole area, not just one part of it."

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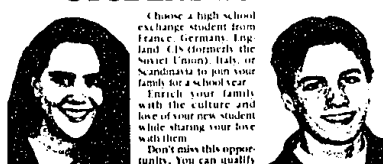
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