

Webb: Role as parent is first

The hardest part about being a school board member?

Some would immediately list the long meetings, the irate parents, and constant state funding cuts. But for Farmington School Board president Cathleen Webb, sometimes it's just being a school mom.

When she can, Webb gets involved in her sons' school activities. Jim, 14, and Matt, 12, go to Power Middle School where she is a member of the parent organization.

Webb is busy preparing decorations for a Hawaiian luau, which is part of the eighth-grade recognition ceremony at Power school.

"One of the things I really appreciate when I'm not a board

member and I am at my sons' school, they let me be a parent," Webb said. "That's my identity. I'm a parent and a mom."

"I do this other stuff for fun."

Webb and her husband of nearly 20 years, Jim, like to take their sons on outdoor adventures. The family is avid boaters and recently bought a cottage at Torch Lake, near Traverse City.

The Webbs are also skiers. Last year, they were caught up in the snow avalanches pounding Colorado.

"That was the most frightening thing I've ever gone through," Webb said. "It was unbelievable."

"When we drove through the avalanche area, we literally missed it by 10 or 15 minutes."



SHARON LEWIS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Helping hand: Marjorie Harke-ma (left) and Shanon LeBlanc work along-side parent and school board member Cathleen Webb on decorations for the eighth-grade recognition party at Power Middle School.

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challenger vie for two seats, appearing to make her anything but vulnerable.

"I'm taking it very seriously," Webb said. "You have to take the position seriously, and you have to take the election seriously."

Webb obviously hasn't let a rocky outlook color reality.

Webb's a friendly face on the board. She goes to great lengths to make visitors welcomed at meetings.

She can also be stoic in a storm of criticism, and when the need is there, firm.

That was proven during boundary changes for middle school students, she said.

"That was one of the first real controversies as a board member I cut my teeth and took the lead on," Webb said. "I can remember at a board meeting making the proposal of what we should actually do."

"People in the audience stood up and pointed their fingers at me and were really angry. But it all turned out fine."

She has the same optimistic

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prescription for the future.

With the state controlling funds, Webb sees board members becoming more of advocates in Lansing.

The board will continue to monitor overcrowding situations such as the one last year at Beechview Elementary, she said. The district is also embarking on a five-year renovation program designed to create more room at the three high schools.

"Other than that, I think we're OK," Webb said. "We have to be fiscally responsible before we go and look at putting on additions. We may be using Band-Aid approaches to get us through the coming year."

She doesn't see the new law firing teachers for strikes affecting negotiations, either. "The board has made a commitment to bar-

gain in good faith," Webb said.

Though she did in 1990, Webb also said she won't take a financial campaign contribution from the teachers union.

Webb touts the district's willingness to be innovative, and yet provide a traditional education. The district is second to none in the state, she believes.

"I spoke to one of the employee groups that was receiving awards and one of the things I said to them is, 'We need to brag about the things we do,'" Webb said. "I think too many people, especially educators, are too humble in that they don't talk about the good things they do and how they affect lives."

Farmington Public Schools is an excellent school district. . . I think we need to get that message out."

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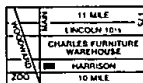
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