

Brouillette

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re-educate themselves." Brouillette, who has daughters attending O.E. Dunckel Middle School and Farmington High School, said the large volume of "conflicting information" - triggered by technology - is making teaching itself almost a moving target.

The fact that teachers are changing the lives of their students every day is why Brouillette is an unwavering supporter of educators.

Proven record

"I think there's a particular art to being a successful teacher," said Brouillette, a thoughtful and soft-spoken board member who goes by the nickname Prill. "And it's an honored profession."

Brouillette said she is disappointed that voters do not have a choice to make on Monday, June 12. They will re-elect her and Gary Sharp to four-year terms. "I think my record would stand up very well in a contested race."

But her reason for running again is the same as in 1996, when she was a victorious challenger.

"I don't have an agenda beyond working to achieve the best education possible for Farmington's kids," Brouillette said. "My qualities of being fair, listening and studying the issues have served me well in my first term."

Another strength is being able to work as part of a team. Brouillette said she promoted collaboration between the district and employee unions at the bargaining table.

Brouillette fairly bristles at the notion that the school board - which rarely disagrees on anything at public meetings - is a rubber stamp for Superintendent Bob Maxfield, a suggestion made by some.

Challenging

The board members "rely on the experts," yet are well prepared for meetings and are in daily conversation with Maxfield on important subjects.

"Bob Maxfield is one of the real treasures in the educational world," she said. "His ability to

I think my record would stand up very well in a contested race.

Priscilla Brouillette
—Farmington Board of Education

understand our community, to work with our staff and to bring out the best in people has earned the praise and respect of the entire board. (The board is far from being a rubber stamp. We challenge his thinking and he challenges ours.)"

One of the issues where there is regular dialogue between board members and Maxfield certainly is about the November ballot proposal that would change the state constitution pertaining to vouchers.

If the proposal is approved, it would permit citizens in districts where graduation rates are less than two-thirds to enroll their children in private and parochial schools. Farmington does not fall into that category, but Brouillette is making the rounds informing parent groups about the potential impact locally.

"It is complex and every voter should attempt to educate themselves on the issue," she said. "When they read into it, I think they'll be alarmed at the impact this would have on Farmington schools and on the state (education) budget. The framers of the ballot initiative have been very clever in confusing the issue."

Get out and vote

One of the points Brouillette is trying to make with the public is the need to vote, on June 12. If the voucher proposal is approved in November, only 10 percent of next week's voter turnout in Farmington and Farmington Hills would need to sign a petition to include a voucher question on the June 2001 school board ballot.

Brouillette, active in diversity issues with the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council of Farmington-Farmington Hills, is not one to brag about past accomplish-

Brouillette

Name: Priscilla Brouillette
Age: 47
Residence: Farmington Hills
School board Elected: in 1996
Family: Husband, Barry; daughters, Catherine, 16, Ann Marie, 12
Education: Bachelor of arts degree in English from Butler University in Indianapolis
Occupation: Homemaker, retired businesswoman
Other: Active in the community, such as judging a recent Optimat essay contest; member of First Presbyterian Church of Farmington; active with the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council of Farmington-Farmington Hills

ments on the board.

"I can't separate what I want to happen the next four years without looking at the past four," she summed up. "I'm really proud of what we've accomplished. We have probably the most forward-thinking safe schools plan of any community I know."

"We were, as a district and as a community, just as horrified as everyone else (about the Columbine High School shootings) but we were so much further along in terms of the way we work with our cities, the way we work with our police. I think one of the things I will continue to emphasize over the next four years is our very close working relationship with the cities."

On Monday, June 12, voters will re-elect Brouillette and Sharp to four-year terms on the Farmington school board.

Sharp, a Bloomfield Hills attorney.

Another highlight for Sharp are the segments of school board meetings devoted to student excellence. At a recent meeting, students performed on string instruments for the board.

The payoff

"Getting to see those kinds of things, those are things that the general public doesn't get to see," Sharp said. "There's the (Farmington Area PTA-sponsored) Reflections program, (displaying) the talent these kids have beginning in kindergarten."

"The payoff for the long hours that we put in, for the volunteerism we put in, is seeing the kids and seeing the kids excel. It really does make it all worth it."

Protecting the future of the arts departments in Farmington schools is one reason why he wants to continue as one of the district's caretakers, particularly during an era when state funding of public education is about as iffy as whether or not Juan Gonzalez will sign a contract with the Detroit Tigers.

Speaking of dollars and athletics, one of Sharp's goals on the board is for the district to do more to fund school sports programs.

"I would like to see us be in a position where we can get rid of the pay-for-play sports (such as the unified high school hockey team) and fund them," said Sharp, who is a youth sports coach in his spare time.

Fulfilling a promise

Also important items on the board member's check list are completing projects from the 1997 bond issue, and following through on the elementary school study and expansion of technology classrooms.

About bond issue projects, Sharp said the district is "definitely in the home stretch. We want to make sure that all the K-12 buildings are having done what was promised to voters at the time of the bond issue."

According to Sharp, the lack of a contested race isn't minimizing

Sharp

Name: Gary Sharp
Age: 42
Residence: Farmington Hills
School Board Appointed: in 1998 to fill vacancy; elected to one-year term in June 1999.
Family: Wife, Terrie; sons, Andrew, 11; Ryan, 8
Education: Bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Arizona; law degree from Pepperdine University.
Occupation: Attorney, Foley & Mansfield in Bloomfield Hills.
Other: Youth baseball and football coach for the North Farmington West Bloomfield Little League; youth basketball coach at the YMCA.

public debate about important topics such as vouchers.

"Does it (uncontested race) restrict getting the issues out? No. I think both Prill (Priscilla Brouillette) and I have been available," he said. "We talk to groups all the time. Part of what I do with the voucher presentations is also ask parents about any concerns about the board or other issues."

"There needs to be testing of the issues. There needs to be testing of the individuals running."

There probably will be no greater test this year than the brewing battle over vouchers. In November, voters will decide whether to amend the state constitution. A successful amendment would open the door in Michigan for vouchers to private and parochial schools - which would reduce funding for public education.

For months, Sharp has been one of the board leaders in the fight against the proposal. He also participated in an informational video on the topic, a pro-

ject completely financed by private citizens.

Taking the time

Between now and November, Sharp intends to be feeding information to whoever will take it in. That is the challenge.

"Unless something directly affects a person they tend not to listen or take the time to become educated," Sharp emphasized. "Seventy percent of our residents don't have school-age children, and yet society benefits every day from the kids who come out of the public school system."

"So they really should take the time. But it's going to be very difficult to get the message out and to get the truth out."

Sharp also wants to set the record straight on a perception by some that the school board - a united group - fits snugly into the pocket of Superintendent Bob Maxfield.

"I can understand where the perception comes from, because the board is an incredibly cohesive group," Sharp said. "We don't have rancor at the meetings. We have an incredibly good working relationship with our administration, starting with Dr. Maxfield. ... (But) are we a rubber stamp? Absolutely not."

He noted a recent board decision to reject the administration's plan to upgrade portables at Farmington High School.

"We sent the administration back to rework that plan, which they did," Sharp continued. "...That's just the latest incident in which the board has not agreed with an initial plan set forth from the administration."

Meanwhile, Sharp is looking forward to serving a full term on the board, continuing to employ his chosen profession to deal with complex school district issues.

"I really enjoy this," Sharp said. "The thing I love the most about the board are the people. It is just a great group of people to work with. It's also intellectually stimulating. There are many things that go on, from a legal nature, within the district that I've been able to help with."

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