

Letters & Opinion

The Inmates Are Running the Asylum

To the editor:

Today I attended the Souhegan High School Community Council's hearing to appeal the Council's recent decision to discontinue the decile system, Souhegan's version of class ranking.

The very premise of doing away with rankings, because recognizing the academic excellence of the few erodes the self esteem of the others, is so obviously preposterous, counterintuitive and detrimental in preparing our young adults for an intensely competitive world, that the debate on the merits of such an action is tantamount to the elimination of scoring a football game to ensure no one has to lose. Additionally, many colleges and most scholarship applications actually require a class ranking to remain competitive for admission or reward. What kind of stewardship are we offering our hard-working children who will be less likely to obtain college admissions or scholarships with this insanity?

Much to my added surprise, it turns out that the decision on whether to rank is actually not particularly relevant because over 69% of our high school students are ranked in the top two deciles, thereby earning the titles of valedictorian or salutatorian. When over two-thirds of all students are ranked as top performers we have a serious credibility problem. Either our grades are inflated or we have diluted down the curriculum to the most common of denominators. I would assume the same false logic that plays in the drive to stop rankings has also provided the basis for awarding top grades to all students in order to prevent hurt feelings.

Clearly the values at SHS that prevent excellence by commandeering mediocrity are misguided. It is no wonder that in a recent conversation with a local university's Director of Admissions, it was said that an application from Souhegan is placed in a "special" pile with the understanding that grades from SHS are "a little different" than grades from other New Hampshire high schools.

Is it responsible to ill-equip our youth for the world to come by artificially protecting them from competition? Is it any wonder that they fail to matriculate year after year into top colleges?

What happened to teaching students that excellence merits recognition, while anything short of that goal should serve only as an impetus to work harder?

Ayn Rand would be turning in her grave.

Brad Galinson
Amherst

Governor Lynch Balances Budget?

To the editor:

If you haven't read the news, Gov. Lynch has finally balanced the 2010/2011 budget. It is somewhat curious why this landmark accomplishment failed to be headline news in all the media. Did I mention that it took enormous assistance from the GOP held legislature in order for this to be accomplished? Before the next election cycle begins and our worthy opposition claims a balanced budget for this past year, not unlike the other "balanced budget" that was balanced on the future debt of your children and grandchildren let's put the facts on the table and promise not to forget them.

The Governor was advised continually from as early as this past January that his budget was in deep trouble estimated to be 50 million dollars. The warnings were ignored until June when it became evident that his budget continued to be in deficit mode. Not until requested in June to provide evidence of his conviction that he indeed had a balanced budget did he identify sources for about half of the projected deficit, he then attempted to raid dedicated funds, the authorization for which was appropriately denied. Running out of options and money, 14 million in the hole, the raiding party then visited the "rainy day" fund and striped it nearly clean but not enough money in that fund to pay for the excesses. Still so severely over budget, he needed more and nowhere to turn but to the legislature for help. Given no other option and the severity of the issue Gov. Lynch arranged to raid funds originally established to fund Medicaid patients in nursing homes, pulling about 5 million dollars from that line item. I have no idea what happens when Grandma and Grandpa have been shorted 5 million dollars. I'm told by reliable sources this money might as easily have ended up in HHS to help the neediest or to some other equally deserving use.

Remember, once the re-election cycle begins it was not the Governor or his party that balanced the budget it was this year's legislature that made it happen.

Rep. Peter Hansen
Hillsboro District 6
Amherst/Milford

Letters To the editor:

The Amherst Citizen is eager to serve as a community forum. We welcome your letters, opinions, and commentaries and make every effort to run them in their entirety. We do reserve the right to edit. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the staff of The Amherst Citizen.

Please direct your letters, views and commentary to the Editor, The Amherst Citizen, P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291, or e-mail your submission to: news@amherstcitizen.com. We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

Community Council Eliminates Use of a Decile Ranking System

To the editor:

On June 13th, the Community Council of Souhegan HS passed a proposal that eliminates the use of a Decile Ranking System for seniors. The proposal goes into effect without a comprehensive replacement system that best positions our students both for admission to colleges and for potential scholarship dollars. In addition, the decision of the Community Council was appealed, rejected and awaits further appeal with the Souhegan School Board.

Although the removal of the decile system has the support of many students, our guidance department and many faculty members, it is simply wrong to change the rules at this late date, for the members of the Class of 2012 who wish to avail of themselves of a widely understood and recognized system of academic distinction. The Class of 2012 entered Souhegan HS three years ago with an understanding of how they would be ranked as they applied to colleges in the Fall of their senior year. How do we teach them to abide by the rules, when the rules can be a moving target?

Although no action plan was presented to the community, there may well be other methods of best positioning students to colleges. As a community, we should want only the best for all of our students. However, any change to current procedure should begin with the incoming class of 2015 so that adequate time, research and discussion can be brought to bear by all Souhegan stakeholders.

To learn more I urge you to read the Decile Proposal on the Souhegan web site, and read the appeal that was published in the Amherst Citizen in early June. In addition, when the appeal is heard by the Souhegan School Board I urge you attend that meeting regardless if you have school age children or if they are not yet of high school age.

Respectfully,
Mike Heaney
Amherst

Removal of Decile Ranking System From Souhegan.

Prepared speech delivered at Community Council meeting, June 13th by Michael Heaney

To the editor:

I would like to read a prepared statement that has the support of most if not all of the parents here today, as well as many who could not be here due to the time of today's meeting. First and foremost we are here to call for a vote on the appeal that was presented to the Executive Council to overturn the decision to remove the decile ranking system from Souhegan.

Contrary to the views of at least one student who said that "some stupid parent is appealing the decile proposal", it should be clear by now that this is a conversation that has drawn the considerable attention of Amherst, Mt Vernon and Souhegan families, all of whom are stake holders in our high school community, just as students and faculty are.

An important distinction however is that we as parents will be here long after the current members of the community council have graduated and many of us are the parents of future Souhegan students and live in this community as homeowners, and tax payers. Our opinions and support is sought after each year when school budgets are presented and our opinions and support should be sought here today. Throughout this process, I believe the parents have extended every courtesy and measure of respect possible to both the authors of the proposal and the community council process itself and I hope we will receive that same courtesy and respect regardless of our differences.

The appeal of the decile proposal decision was based on three critical criteria: that the depth of the research provided to the community was minimal at best and questionable at worst – that the essential basis for the proposal, to follow national trends is completely opposite of the core values of the Coalition of Essential Schools – and that the impact on the current junior class members who have earned the right to be designated as Top Decile Students goes against every measure of Fairness, Decency and Trust – the values that you as administrators and faculty members have taught our children for three years.

It is one of the great joys of my life to serve as a Souhegan coach. I believe we have a special place here, and I could not be prouder to have my children attend Souhegan. But as a coach I could not imagine standing in front of my team and asking them to accept a rule change at the end of their season that would deny them a victory they had earned. I likewise can not imagine our football program taking down a championship banner because they were deemed to simply be too successful. Yet that is what you are asking us to do as parents of Juniors who have earned an academic distinction. It is not in keeping with our mission statement to be "a community" "born of RESPECT, TRUST AND COURAGE."

A vote for the appeal today recognizes that the current proposal as written and voted on is inherently unfair to the incoming seniors on the eve of their senior year. A vote for the appeal is not a vote against your peers, it is a vote for compromise. Compromise that can ensure the proposal will not be put into effect until amended and serve ALL students, honoring achievements and seeking the best outcome for all of our students while respecting the input of Souhegan stakeholders. The founders of our high school did not deem this to be a student council, or a faculty council – there was a reason why they conceived of a governing body that would be known as a Community Council, and we are asking for a place at the table.

I read in the Minutes of the May 23rd meeting that Leadership is defined by making decisions even when some will be unhappy with the decision. I disagree – Leadership should be defined as bridging the gap between differences to find common ground.

As Nelson Mandela once said, "All differences can be resolved through negotiation - and the principle applies equally to the smallest communities and the highest councils of nations." We urge you to vote right now and move this discussion forward.

Michael Heaney
Amherst

Great Progress By Republican Majority In Bringing Fiscal Sanity Back To State Government

To the editor:

As the 2011 session of the New Hampshire legislature approaches its conclusion, I think it is time to take a look at the great progress our new Republican majority has made in bringing fiscal sanity back to State government and making New Hampshire an attractive place to do business. These were the promises made by our Republican candidates, and in the House of Representatives they have delivered:

- A constitutional amendment requiring a supermajority vote in the House and Senate to raise taxes or borrowing (CACR 6)
- A constitutional amendment to expand local control of education funding by returning the authority to elected officials, not unelected judges (CACR 12)
- A fiscally responsible budget that uses realistic revenue projections, does not create or increase any taxes or fees, does not downshift costs to local communities, and does not increase borrowing. (HB 1 & HB 2)
- A bill to allow local communities to enact spending and tax caps (HB 341)
- A small business tax cut, which is quite a reversal from the Democrats' infamous LLC tax. (HB 557)
- A cigarette tax cut to enhance cross-border sales. (HB 156)
- Right-to-work legislation to preserve worker's rights and attract employers to New Hampshire (HB 474)
- Legislation to move the state pension system (HB 580) and the retiree health plan (HB 231) back to fiscal solvency
- Legislation that enacts a performance-based measurement system for state government (HB 508)
- Elimination of the gambling winnings tax that was costing the state revenue. (HB 229)
- Repeal of the cap-and-tax program known as RGGI (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative) thereby reducing everyone's utility bill (HB 519).

All of these items were passed by the New Hampshire House this session in addition to numerous other bills reducing unnecessary business regulations, reforming and bringing transparency to state government, and protecting civil liberties and parental rights. The budget agreement between the House and Senate reduces spending by an incredible 12.8%. This is the largest spending reduction since World War 2 and a welcome change from the massive spending increases we saw under Democrat control in Concord. I would like to thank our Amherst and Milford State Representatives: Bill Belvin, Sean Coughlin, Gary Daniels, Peter Hansen, Steve Palmer, Bob Rowe, Steve Stepanek, and Bob Willette for all their hard work during this busy legislative session. Well done.

Mark Vincent
Amherst

Children As Soldiers Is A Growing Problem

To the editor:

An issue that many people are unaware of is that children as young as six years old are being recruited to fight in wars worldwide. Though has it been an issue for many years, it is not popular in the media so many people remain unaware there are children in armed conflict, much less that they can do something to help these children.

Children who are recruited to fight in armed conflict are almost always living in poverty. Many times, children are kidnapped and forced to kill a family member to ostracize them from their community so the military group becomes their "family". In places where war is prevalent, children might be sold to rebel groups or government armies for money or protection. These children are used as spies, cooks, scouts, they are sent on suicide missions and sent into combat, sometimes even to the front lines. In the world, there are 250,000 children involved in armed conflict. 40% of these soldiers are girls who are also used as 'wives' for commanding officers and are forced to create the next generation of child soldiers. The international law states that recruitment of children into military groups is a war crime and a crime against humanity, but it's not being enforced in many countries.

Children being used as soldiers is a growing problem that many people don't think they can do anything about. This is false. There are organizations, such as Invisible Children, that create programs to spread awareness and build schools and refugee camps for impoverished children. By donating to these organizations, no matter how small, people can make a difference in a child's life.

Sincerely,
Meghan Bedard
Amherst

Closed for Vacation

The offices of The Amherst Citizen will be closed from Wednesday, June 29 through Sunday July 17. Visit us online: www.amherstcitizen.com to view the current or archived issues, or for other information.

Have a Happy 4th!



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