

Is bullying a problem for WAPS?

by NATHANIEL NELSON

“This school is terrible. It’s full of racists and bullies, nobody likes this place and nobody feels safe,” one stu-

dent wrote.

“I feel teachers don’t really do anything about bad people or bad things people do. They say they will but really don’t do the right thing for a student

who isn’t comfortable at the school,” said another.

These comments, and hundreds of others, were sent to Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) as part of the district’s

climate survey, which asked parents, students, and staff across the district how they feel about the district’s current social climate. The results, which the Post examined on Monday and will

be shared with the full WAPS Board on Thursday, show the biggest concern expressed was bullying, with students

see **BULLYING** page 6a

Despite downturn, county still recycling



File photo

■ Winona County workers and volunteers sorted through recyclables (and all manner of other items) in 2015. Despite a difficult market, officials report that all of Winona County’s recyclables are being recycled. Residents can help recyclers by only putting appropriate items in the blue bins.

by CHRIS ROGERS

There have been depressing news for some American communities in recent months: recyclers forced to throw away paper and plastic or cit-

ies closing down recycling programs. Since China, previously a major importer of recyclables, stopped accepting many recyclable materials from the U.S. and other countries last year, the domestic market for old milk jugs

and magazines has drooped like soggy cardboard. Are Winona County’s recyclables still being recycled?

Yes, Green Circle Recycling General Manager Mathias Harter said. Green Circle is a La Crosse-based

recycling center — known as a material recovery facility (MRF) — that is part of the Harter’s family business, including Harter’s Quick Clean-Up,

see **RECYCLING** page 7a

YMCA project now \$18M, to begin this summer

by CHRIS ROGERS

The Winona Family YMCA is still working on its project to build a new Y in partnership with Winona Health. Last week, Y leaders announced a new, higher cost estimate for the building and laid out a timeline for the project moving forward.

Last fall, Y and Winona Health officials held a ceremonial groundbreaking at the site, but construction has yet to begin. Last week, Y leaders announced they expect to open contractors’ bids in June and begin construction in July. At the time of the groundbreaking, the project was estimated to cost \$14.5 million. Now, it is now estimated to cost \$18 million. The Y has raised \$13.2 million so far.

The Y is continuing its fundraising efforts, including seeking federal tax credits worth \$3.5 million, if awarded. In an email to members, Y leaders wrote, “It’s not a matter of IF we get the new building. It’s only a matter of WHEN!”

see **YMCA** page 5a

Winonans urge Sen. Miller at town hall

by CHRIS ROGERS

With just three weeks left to go in the legislative session, Minnesota Senate President Jeremy Miller (R-Winona) held a town hall in Winona last Saturday to hear from constituents on some of the key issues facing state lawmakers.

Driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants

A proposal to allow undocumented immigrants to apply for driver’s li-

censes in Minnesota was a main topic at last weekend’s town hall. The Winona City Council and Winona County law enforcement officials have endorsed it, saying the bill would improve public safety by making sure undocumented immigrants on the road are trained and tested on driving and can purchase car insurance, while opponents argue the bill endorses and accommodates illegal immigration. The DFL-controlled

see **MILLER** page 5a

St. Martin’s breaks ground



Photo by Nathaniel Nelson

■ Six-year-old Kylan Lor gets ready to be the first child to plunge a golden shovel into the spot of the soon-to-be new St. Martin’s Lutheran School building during Monday’s groundbreaking ceremony.

by NATHANIEL NELSON

Early on Monday morning, the parking lot of St. Martin’s Lutheran School filled with students, families and teachers preparing for the beginning of a new era — the groundbreaking for the new St. Martin’s elementary

school and early childhood facility. The \$4.8-million project, more than a decade in the making, is now only 13 months away from completion with the largest shift in the Lutheran school’s century-old history.

The groundbreaking was the second of two, explained reverend Rich-

ard Moore, with a more “official” groundbreaking taking place on Sunday afternoon. However, Monday’s groundbreaking was a more personal affair. Instead of directors and financiers digging into the ground, families

see **ST. MARTIN’S** page 5a

Ready Set School shoots for \$44K goal

by NATHANIEL NELSON

The school year is just about wrapping up, but for local nonprofit Ready Set School (RSS), the season has only just begun. The organization is in the midst of its fundraising campaign for

the upcoming 2019-2020 school year, aiming to raise \$44,000 for students in the county to start their school year stocked up on pencils and flaunting a

see **READY** page 4a



FAMILY Milestones

Obituaries

Machutt, Robert Joseph



Robert Joseph Machutt, 86, of Dakota, died on Monday, April 29, 2019, at his home. Robert was born on January 10, 1933, in Winona, to John and Mamie Machutt. Robert graduated from Cotter High

School. On October 25, 1952, he married Lois Ann Lintleman. He was a member of the Basilica of St. Stanislaus Kostka. Robert worked at Northwest Bell Telephone Company for 37 years. Robert enjoyed listening to polka music, woodworking and going to Vegas. He is survived by his wife, Lois; five children, Debbie (Dave Ralls) McAlister, Michael Machutt (Barbara Formicelli), Tom (Pat) Machutt, Sue Machutt (Dana Matson) and Becky Ringenberg; 11 grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren; and one brother, Harold. He was preceded in death by his parents. Per Robert's wishes, private family services will be held. Hoff Celebration of Life Center, Goodview, is assisting the family with arrangements.

Burke, Colleen Kay



Colleen Kay Burke, 57, of Winona, died on Sunday, April 28, 2019, at her home after a tough battle with Multiple Myeloma. Colleen was born on August 19, 1961, in Winona, to James and Vivian (Glende) Burke. She grew up the youngest girl in a family of eight children. She graduated from Winona Senior High School in 1979. She worked as a waitress for many restaurants around town over the years. Colleen loved the Winona area and especially the Mississippi River. She had three boys that were the center of her universe, Zach, Brandon, and Matthew. One day while she

was working at Jefferson's she met her soul mate, Sam Harrison. After a little while the two began dating and have been together for 13 years. She is survived by the love of her life, Sam Harrison; sons, Zachary Zaborowski, Brandon Zaborowski, Matthew Zaborowski; grandchildren, David and Dylan; extended family, Adam Harrison, Holly (Dan) Burt and their children, Mikayla, Daniel "Tre," Sam, Emily; siblings, Dennis Burke, Casey (Reyne Athanas) Burke, Terry Burke, Maureen "Mimi" Shook, Kelley (Scott Lande) Burke, Briget Scott, Devon Burke; and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, James "Pat" and Vivian. A visitation will be held from 4-7 p.m. on Thursday, May 2, 2019, at Hoff Celebration of Life Center, Goodview. Private family memorial service will take place at a later date. Burial at St. Mary's Cemetery, Winona. In lieu of flowers, memorials preferred to Paula's Purse, Gundersen Medical Foundation, 1836 South Avenue, La Crosse, Wis., 54601. Make checks payable to Gundersen Medical Foundation and indicate Paula's Purse in the check memo.

Arrangements

Dingfelder, Alida

Alida Dingfelder, 83, of Pickwick, died on Tuesday, April 30, 2019. Her funeral service will be at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Pickwick. Visitation will be from 10 a.m. until the time of the service. - Hoff Celebration of Life Center, Goodview

Lowney, Doris E. (Gilbertson)

Doris E. (Gilbertson) Lowney, age 81, of Newark Ohio, formerly of Arcadia, Wis., died on April 4, 2019. Memorial services were held in Newark at the Henderson-Van Atta-Stickle Funeral Home Chapel on April 11, 2019. Graveside inurnment will be at 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 11, 2019, at Fagnes Lutheran Church Cemetery, County Road N, Blair, Wis., with a time to gather afterward at Newcomb Valley Inn.

Wilson, Steven R. 'Willy'

Steven R. "Willy" Wilson, age 67, of Winona, passed away on Monday, April 29, 2019. Visitation will be held from noon until the funeral service at 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at the Watkowski-Mulyck Funeral Home. Burial will be in the Pickwick Cemetery.

Births

On Friday, April 5, Margaret Wiersgalla and Kyle Rumpel of Arcadia welcomed a son.

Andrea and Derek Robinson of Cochrane welcomed a daughter on Sunday, April 7.

Samantha Hjelmeland and Christian Pelowski, both of Winona, welcomed a son, Drew Leonard Pelowski, on April 9, 2019. His maternal grandparents are Tina and Brian Hjelmeland of Winona and his paternal grandparents are Patti and Joe Pelowski of Winona.

Arron and Michelle Zimmerman welcomed a son, Leon Arron, on April 16, 2019. Pa-

ternal grandparents are David Zimmerman of Minnesota City and Deb and Ward Anderson of Stockton. Maternal grandparents are Gary and Sharon Schmalzriedt of Wabasha.

Paige Schewe of Winona welcomed a daughter, Zoe, on April 17, 2019. Her maternal grandparents are Julie Bilicki and Denny Schewe of Winona.

On April 19, 2019, Harley and Sabrina of Winona welcomed a son, Hudson Daniel Sherman. Maternal grandparents are DeeAnn Pfund of Fountain City and paternal grandparents are Brad and Ann Sherman of Stockton.

Bullying

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and parents relaying tales of teasing, harassment, stalking and physical violence. More than 76 percent of middle and high school students have heard slurs or derogatory terms used against classmates and 31.49 percent have heard teachers or other adults make negative remarks about particular groups of students; 63.42 percent of elementary students reported seeing bullying in their classrooms; and 29.10 percent of teachers said they believe their students are not safe at school. The more than 1,000 responses paint a picture of WAPS as a district with rampant bullying, behavioral issues, racial problems and tension between families and administrators.

The climate survey, overseen by WAPS Director of Learning and Teaching Maurella Cunningham, is part of the district's initiative to combat cultural problems within the WAPS' system. The initiative was implemented last year after the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (DHR) discovered a disparity in the suspension rate between white students and students of color and identified the district as potentially discriminatory, leading to the district signing an agreement with the DHR to take steps to improve. In the 2017-2018 school year, WAPS suspended black students more than 7 times as often as their white peers.

While the district has been conducting some steps internally to combat the issues through cultural competency training for staff and equity examinations of the school buildings, one of the elements of the agreement involved talking directly with parents, students and staff to examine other ways the district could improve. The survey, which was completed by more than 1,500 students, staff and parents, was conducted for that purpose.

The survey was split into four parts: third- and fourth-graders, parents, staff, and middle- and high-schoolers. Each survey covered much of the same material, asking respondents to provide input on topics including safety, commonality of slurs, bullying, communication and racial issues.

On Thursday, the WAPS Board will examine the results of the survey as well as a plan to address the concerns raised by respondents.

According to the survey, 31.82 percent of staff reported they thought students were not comfortable reporting abuse, and 36.36 percent said that there was a lack of communication between district staff, administra-

tors, and the community. Seventy percent of respondents stated they had heard students use slurs or derogatory terms against one another, and 80.91 percent stated they had heard students tease or ridicule other students.

"Despite best efforts, the resources are not adequate. Students who do not have the extreme behaviors are exposed to language, violence and a culture of extreme disrespect," one staff member wrote. "Behaviors are, without a doubt, impacting the learning of all."

It wasn't only students, either — some staff members noted that they had heard fellow staff making comments about students.

"I have heard a lot of comments directed towards students who are not 'typical.' These students 'don't get it' or don't have certain materials because they are different in means such as race, special education, etc.," another wrote. "I see that certain teachers make comments about students because of how the child is raised and family priorities."

The student portion of the survey rendered similar responses. For example, 40.71 percent said they don't look forward to coming to school, and 76.09 percent stated they had heard slurs used in the hallways. Some students noted that staff themselves can be ambivalent to the issues, and while there are many teachers who are respectable and easy to talk to, there are others who ignore problems when they surface.

"I think a big part of the problem with the student climate is a lack of consistency and action. I have heard many stories from many people who have come forward about situations of sexual/verbal/racial harassment and have been told there was nothing that could be done. Students don't report because even when they do, they don't feel heard or even believed," one student wrote.

Different students cited racial, sexual and other derogatory terms as commonplace in the middle and high schools, with one student claiming their teacher "thinks it is OK to say racial slurs to their students."

Parents were more blunt about their complaints with the district, as some came out in defense of their children and others placed the blame squarely on administrators. One parent said their daughter was sexually assaulted at W-K elementary and nothing was done, while another said their child came home crying after being told to kill themselves by their classmates.

"My daughter is bullied every day and it feels like the school does nothing to protect her," one parent wrote.

"My [child] makes comments about older kids being mean to

her. Now she made a comment, 'When I am in fourth grade, I can be mean to the kindergarten and first graders.' It breaks my heart," another wrote.

Another thread within the parental surveys was a distrust of the district, with numerous parents claiming that they were planning on moving their children out of the district to keep them safe. One said the district had a "dysfunctional" culture where staff and parents were at odds, while others called the district a "good old boys club" that favored some students over others.

According to the survey, 48.72 percent of parents said their students do not feel comfortable reporting harassment or racial abuse to school officials, while others claimed that staff within the district had been little to no help for the growth of their children.

"Know that we are a family where my wife and I are both middle school level educators and we work hard to piece together his botched fifth and sixth grade years while at WMS. I believe in public education, but not at the expense of my own child's experience," one parent wrote.

There were some positive notes in the survey, as well. Elementary schools in particular were more positive, with many students highlighting their schools, teachers, principals and friends. Some parents also spoke highly of the district, citing their students' positive experiences in the classroom and their teachers.

However, as a whole, the survey shows some high walls for equity and accessibility, with dozens of parents and students recounting their negative experiences with the public school system and some calling the survey itself a mistake.

"Nice try with the race baiting survey. Can't help by wonder if this is an attempt to deflect from the real issue within WAPS. Disruptive classrooms, lack of discipline, unwillingness to challenge students, etc. I would move my kids tomorrow if I could talk my wife into it," a parent said.

Bullying in WAPS

Throughout the survey responses, there was one common thread that weaved its ways across the pages: WAPS has a bullying problem.

"The druggies rule the school. You say anything negative to them, they'll threaten to fight you. They won't ever shut up. ... I absolutely hate my grade because all they do is treat everyone with disrespect," one student wrote. "This school is terrible. It's full of racists and bullies, nobody likes this place and nobody feels safe," another added.

Even in the elementary school,

bullying was noted as commonplace: 63.92 percent of students said they had heard students make fun of or tease other students at school.

"I was bullied since I was in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade," wrote one elementary student.

"We have some very naughty kids in my class and my teacher works hard to get the naughty kids back to work, but sometimes kids get violent," another said.

Dozens of responses from parents, students and staff all cited bullying as a prevalent issue within the WAPS system, and safety was a concern for many. This mirrors an earlier survey from WAPS of parents who left the district over the past year. In that study, 19 parents stated they moved their child from WAPS because of dissatisfaction with the control of behavior issues in the classroom, and 16 stated that their child did not feel safe.

Board chair Nancy Denzer stressed that some schools, including the Winona Middle School, have been working on combating the issue in recent years, and while there is still work to be done, the schools have made progress.

"They've done a lot of work to address the issues that they have," Denzer said.

However, details for specific interventions were not provided by WAPS administration. Superintendent Rich Dahman declined to answer questions regarding bullying, including what is being done to combat bullying in the hallways, how teachers and staff are trained to intervene and report instances of bullying, or what efforts have been done to stymie the issues in WAPS schools. He also declined answer questions about curriculum being taught in the elementary schools and middle school on the topic, aside from the "Character Counts" program at Goodview Elementary.

"I do think there should be all school programs (for students) to promote equity, reporting, modeling dos and don'ts, [and] positive behavior reinforcement," one staff member commented.

Dahman stated that Cunningham would be putting together a presentation on the steps the schools are taking to address the concerns raised in the survey, but did not share any additional details.

"School safety doesn't just mean intruders," a staff member wrote. "I feel like many of us are more concerned about safety within a school, students being aggressive, violent, damaging property and injuring staff and other students. Teachers and staff are trying to change behaviors but need more support."

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