

Capital City Hues
Madison School Board Update
By President Johnny Winston, Jr.

The first day of school on September 4th is rapidly approaching. I would like to give the readers of Capital City Hues an update on several decisions that the Madison school board made affecting district policy.

First, the board unanimously passed the \$333 million dollar budget for the 2006-07 school year. A notable budget amendment includes a 5th grade student strings program to be offered two times per week at elementary schools. Emerson school will pilot a program with students having the choice of either general music or strings. Changes in the budget restored some of the elementary library pages, a program in our high schools called “Connect” and a garbage truck has been purchased to end the threat of privatization of this service. In addition, the board also approved community services funding for Kasjab House and the Gay Straight Alliances for Safe Schools. This year, because of state imposed revenue limits, the board cut around \$6 million dollars from the operating budget. This is an unfortunate yearly circumstance that public schools have to endure. I will discuss this matter further in future articles.

Second, the board approved a wellness policy that will now prohibit the sale of soft drinks at local high schools in favor of milk, diet sodas, bottled water and 100% juices. In addition, it will stop the sale of “junk food” during the school day that put high school cafeterias in competition with school stores or vending machines. This policy was developed in part because of a federal mandate that all schools nationwide must have a wellness policy. The board also approved advertising and sponsorship policies. These policies have very clear parameters. Examples of where ads and sponsorship could occur include the district website, newsletters and announcements at sporting events. Given our fiscal challenges, I believe that this is an appropriate policy that I hope will help preserve some of our extra-curricular, arts and sports programs which are often vulnerable to budget cuts. Lastly, the board approved a policy that allows animals to be used in the classroom by teachers in their educational curriculum but also protects students that have allergies or other safety concerns.

Third, the board has approved a \$23.5 million building referendum on November 7th. This referendum is a long-range solution to alleviate overcrowding in the West and Memorial high school attendance areas. If voters approve the referendum, a new elementary school will be built in Linden Park; money will be available outside of the operating budget to pay for a much needed new cafeteria, kitchen and remodeling of the over capacity Leopold elementary school and the refinancing of past building loans to provide some relief under the revenue caps thus reducing the number of budget cuts necessary. The fiscal impact for a \$239,400 home will mean raising school district taxes an extra \$29.21 a year.

Lastly, the board identified several areas of emphasis for the upcoming year. Among the many ideas generated, four were identified as priorities. They are:

- Expulsions, Truancy, Drop Out and Attendance
- Budget
- Equity

- Development of specific measurable goals for academic achievement and strategic plan

In closing I encourage the readers of Capital City Hues who are parents to be active in their children's education at their local school. Get to know your child's teacher and principal. By working together, we will see our students be successful in the Madison Metropolitan School District.