

• VIEWPOINT •

The value of leadership

By Cathy Kaiser
Chairman, Jamestown
School Committee

Jamestown Schools' administrative structure has been a "hot topic" during Town Council budget sessions and deserves clarification.

Demands on school administrators have increased greatly over the past decade, particularly with the 2002 passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the implementation of corresponding state regulations, standards and rigorous yearly testing. Data reporting requirements have increased exponentially with this heightened accountability. (The U.S. Department of Education now measures administrator paperwork time in "burden hours.") As schools strive to meet the yearly performance targets of NCLB, in addition to local performance expectations, districts must empower administrators to act as instructional leaders.

Ten years ago, Jamestown had three full-time administrators: a superintendent, who also served as principal for both schools, a director of pupil services/special education, and a business manager (at no time did the district have a single administrator). Faced with the reality that three administrators, no matter how talented and hard-working, were unable to fully meet the increasing demands of leading a school district, the then-school committee, and every subsequent school committee, grappled with the challenge of creating an effective leadership structure within the bounds of fiscal responsibility.

In 2003, the school committee added a principal at Melrose School, and our combination superintendent-principal provided oversight at Lawn, assisted by a dean of students (a position filled by a teacher). Over time, it became clear that this model was still not meeting the district's most crucial need - building level leadership. Combining the superintendent-principal jobs seriously short-changed our students and teachers and presented an impossible challenge for any individual striving to perform both roles effectively.

While the superintendent of a district our size can be a part-time position, a school principal cannot. To provide the instructional leadership needed at the building level requires clear articulation of vision, a visible presence, consistent oversight and site-based authority. A building principal also guides curriculum, hires, mentors, and evaluates teachers, and implements programs - all functions crucial to supporting quality classroom instruction.

In the 2006-07 school year, Jamestown moved to a part-time superintendency (eliminating the position of dean of students), and we anchored our principal at Lawn, with an assistant principal at Melrose. This year we are fortunate to have an "aspiring principal" at Melrose - a teacher training to be a principal. Because of this, we are able to replace the assistant principal position with a principalship at minimal additional cost of \$1,087. The 2008-09 budget eliminates the assistant principal position and supports a principal in each school. While replacing the assistant principal position with a principalship has a negligible financial impact, the educational impact will be significant. Both schools will have strong leadership and be able to respond to building-specific weaknesses and promote building-specific strengths.

The current/proposed leadership structure is the result of measured steps taken over time to ensure continuity, stability and the opportunity to assess the effect of each change.

Response to Councilor Sutton

In his April 14 memo to the Town Council, quoted in last week's Jamestown Press, Councilor Robert Sutton paints a picture of a revolving door organizational structure that "has not provided continuity, organizational responsiveness/accountability or financial efficiency." In the past nine years, he writes, "school superintendents have changed four times" and "principals and assistant principals have come and gone."

The nine-year period brought changes, but not the disruptive turnover that Mr. Sutton implies. The period chosen by Mr. Sutton

caught the tail end of the four-year term of Dr. Frances Gallo, followed by Kathy Sipala's four-year superintendency. We moved to a part-time superintendency in 2006 knowing that we would likely be limited to a pool of retired superintendents who, under RI retirement board regulations, could contract for only one-year periods. Retired administrator Dr. Robert Power served as part-time superintendent and helped define that role during the 2006-07 school year. Last fall, the school committee brought in Dr. Marcia Lukon who, as a retired superintendent from Massachusetts, is not subject to RI retirement regulations and was able to commit to a multi-year contract.

Our principal, Kathy Almanzor, has been with the district for 22 years—as a teacher since 1986, as an aspiring principal (principal-in-training) in 2002 and as a principal since 2003. Michael Franco, our assistant principal in 2006-07, accepted a principalship in Newport and was replaced by our current aspiring principal, Carole Melucci.

The direction we move in is not defined by any one administrator or even team of administrators. Our direction is defined in a strategic plan created in 2004 by a team of 38 educators, parents and members of the broader Jamestown community. All administrative and school committee decisions and initiatives, including the proposed leadership structure, support the educational priorities articulated in our strategic plan.

A plan without leadership is just a plan. That's the value of leadership.



Where in the World is the Jamestown Press?

Gregory Ball enjoyed his school vacation last week on the family's Western Caribbean cruise with Norwegian Cruise Line. In this photo, the Ball family, which includes Jill, Gregory, and Jeffrey Ball read the Press on April 15 at Altun Ha, Belize, a Mayan Ruins site.

Hazard family history topic of talk

Historian Helen Farrell Allen will present a program called "Caroline Hazard: Daughter of the House" at the South Kingstown Public Library in Peace Dale. The talk will be Wednesday, May 21, at 7 p.m.

The program begins outdoors at with a tour to include the Hazard Memorial Garden; the "Weaver" Sculpture by Daniel Chester French; and a look at the 1891 library building itself. The talk will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the library meeting room.

The program is free and open to the public. For more information, call Jessica Wilson, 789-1555, ext 112.

KARN'S Law Group

LEGAL TIP

A city can't be sued over its failure to place a traffic signal at an intersection where a boy was killed, the Arizona Supreme Court has ruled in affirming a summary judgment.

The plaintiffs' 13-year-old son was struck and killed by a car while crossing an intersection in Phoenix. The plaintiffs alleged their son's death was the result of the city's failure to install a traffic signal at the intersection where the accident occurred.

The city argued that it could not be liable because state law provided immunity for actions taken by a municipality in "the exercise of an administrative function involving the determination of fundamental governmental policy."

The court agreed that the city's decision not to place a traffic signal at the intersection where the accident occurred fell within the scope of governmental immunity.



PERSONAL INJURY LAW

- Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Product Liabilities
- Maritime Injuries
- Social Security Disability

No Fee Unless Successful

The Supreme Court licenses all lawyers in the general practice of law. The court does not license any lawyer as an expert or specialist in any field of practice.

6 VALLEY ROAD • MIDDLETOWN, R.I. 02842
401-841-5300 FAX 401-846-5999 www.karnslaw.com



NOW OPEN for the Season

Market Open Daily
8:30 am - 7 pm

- Unique Gifts
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Cut Flowers
- Fresh Baked Goods
- Gourmet Food
- Ice Cream
- Local Artisans

915 MITCHELL'S LANE
MIDDLETOWN, RI 02842
(401) 847-3912

OPEN SUNDAYS 12-5



J.H. Breakell & Co.
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND



A symbol of longevity, the Ginkgo is a living fossil.

128 SPRING ST. NEWPORT, RI | WWW.BREAKELL.COM | 401.849.0195

KRISTINE S. TROCKI Attorney and Counsellor at Law



KRISTINE S. TROCKI
RESOLVES DISPUTES IN
THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- PERSONAL INJURY
- AUTO ACCIDENTS
- PRODUCT LIABILITY
- MEDICAL MALPRACTICE
- WRONGFUL DEATH
- LANDLORD/TENANT
- EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION
- WRONGFUL DISCHARGE
- MINOR CRIMINAL OFFENSES
- DIVORCE MEDIATION
- BUSINESS & CONTRACT DISPUTES
- COLLECTIONS

38 Narragansett Avenue, Suite D, Jamestown, RI 02835
tel 401.423.3390 | fax 401.423.3370 | kst@trockilaw.com