



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY VOTER GUIDE - 2008

The League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. We are affiliated with the League of Women Voters of Minnesota, North Dakota and the United States.

The information was supplied to the League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley by the candidates and is an exact copy of their responses to the League's questions. Additional candidate information can be accessed at Vote.lwvminn.org.

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9A MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

**Mark Olaf Altenburg, DFL
Moorhead, Minn.**

What are your views on restoring Local Government Aid to 2000 levels?

Local Government Aid is an important component in the reduction of the property tax burden in Greater Minnesota. Without proper LGA funding, taxes in Moorhead and throughout Clay County become an even greater burden for small businesses and homeowners. The tax burden on the average Minnesota family has increased to the point where it is severely affecting the quality of life for many Minnesota residents, especially the elderly and disabled. When I get to St. Paul I will fight any attempts to reduce LGA and will work to reduce property taxes across the board. I will fight any attempt to reverse the 42 million dollar increase in LGA implemented this past legislative session and the anticipated 2% inflationary increases scheduled for FY2011 and the 4% increase scheduled for FY2012. Currently, Minnesota has slipped into a cycle of regressive taxation and we must do whatever we can to return a sense of fairness to our state tax code.

What are your views on expanding Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association insurance?

Increasing access to affordable healthcare will be my number one priority next year in St. Paul, and I look forward to work closely with my colleagues to implement real solutions which will reduce costs and significantly improve care in Minnesota. Increasing access to affordable healthcare will encourage the creation and growth of small business and will help raise additional revenues for years to come. Addressing the current healthcare crisis will also allow for the reduction of property taxes by increasing the affordability of benefits for employees of school districts, counties and local governments. We can no longer afford to procrastinate. We must act wisely and quickly to fix this fundamentally broken system which denies care, frustrates doctors and nurses, bankrupts families, stifles business growth, and increases local taxes.

What three things would you do to alleviate homelessness in our area?

First, I would help individuals and families find and retain affordable access to healthcare, including chemical and mental health. Second, I will encourage

additional support for families facing foreclosure. Third, I will encourage the State to work with community and faith based agencies to help create and renovate affordable housing across Minnesota.

How would you plan to adequately fund Minnesota school districts to meet the needs of all students?

I am a strong supporter of the "New Minnesota Miracle". This comprehensive education proposal will create a statewide source of funding for our schools, fully fund special education and reduce property taxes while increasing educational achievement. Without a serious approach to E-12 education in Minnesota, we will continue to fall behind the new global standard. Without serious attention we will continue to rely, more and more, on local taxes. Without serious attention we will see increased consolidation of rural schools, reduced extracurricular opportunities, and a continued slide toward mediocrity. Minnesota has been a leader for over a generation because of the emphasis we have placed on the success of our schools and we must once again step up our efforts if we want our kids to succeed in the 21st century. ■

**Rep. Morrie Lanning, Republican
Moorhead, Minn.**

What are your views on restoring Local Government Aid to 2000 lev- els?

In 2000 the state total for Local Government Aid (LGA) was \$394.4 million dollars. In 2009 the state total for Local Government Aid will be \$526.1 million dollars. Therefore, we certainly do not want to go back to 2000 levels. To better illustrate this point, in 2000 the City of Moorhead received \$4.9 million dollars in LGA, but in 2009 Moorhead will receive \$7.8 million dollars. This is an increase of \$2.9 million dollars over the year 2000. The real goal is to get back to and go beyond the level of state aid certified for 2003 (\$586.8 million dollars). That was before the state faced a \$4.5 billion dollar shortfall. For the City of Moorhead, the certified 2003 level of funding would have been \$8.3 million dollars if it would not have been for the state's budget shortfall. If it were not for increases in Moorhead's tax base in recent years and a new aid distribution formula passed in 2008, Moorhead would receive somewhat more than the \$7.8 million dollars we are scheduled to receive in 2009. LGA is very important to local governments, and we will continue work for restoring aid to its previous levels and beyond.

What are your views on expanding access to Minnesota Comprehen- sive Health Association insurance?

Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association insurance is for those who cannot get insurance coverage elsewhere such as a denial for pre-existing conditions or lack of employment benefits. With this health insurance coverage, the premiums are paid for by the insured. The problem is not having access to this insurance coverage rather it is the cost of the coverage. Those who cannot afford this coverage may be eligible for to coverage under MinnesotaCare. Access to and the utilization of MinnesotaCare has been an issue. That is why in the last two years the legislature has extended public benefits to over 50,000 more people. Over 92% of Minnesotans have health insurance coverage, one of the highest rates of coverage in the country. Legislative action on health care reform in 2008 has further expanded eligibility that will result in 8700 more Minnesotans becoming eligible for MinnesotaCare coverage by the year 2011. The reform bill also established coverage for "health care homes" to coordinate care for people with chronic or complex conditions. About 7500 people in public health care programs will now receive this service. I supported this health care reform legislation. Efforts will continue to provide coverage to more Minnesotans and help those who qualify to apply for benefits.

What three things would you do to alleviate homelessness in our area?

In the short-term, we need to expand and strengthen our support for emergency shelters. Many shelters struggle to meet their operational needs. They may need more beds and/or financial support. The additional support needs to come from both the private and public sectors. State government has a role to play in supporting community efforts to provide emergency shelters. It is not acceptable to have people without shelter.

The next step required is to expand the availability of transitional and supportive housing. Moorhead and Clay County have been successful in expanding the availability of housing for those moving out of a homeless situation, but more of this housing is needed. State government has been supportive of these efforts, but more needs to be done.

The real long-term solution to alleviating homelessness is to adopt the recommendations that will be coming out of the Commission to End Poverty by 2020. As a member of this Commission, I am encouraged by the constructive recommendations that are emerging. The

availability of affordable housing, a high school diploma and a post-secondary educational opportunity for everyone, earning higher incomes, building financial and developmental assets, and building public awareness and community engagement will be among the key recommendations in the Commission's final report.

How would you plan to adequately fund Minnesota school districts to meet the needs of all students?

Base funding for K-12 education needs to be increased by the state. While the state of Minnesota covers about 74% of the costs for K-12 education, with local school districts covering 20% and the federal government 6%, as costs continue to go up, the state must also increase its support. If we want to retain some semblance of local control of our schools, the state cannot and should not pick up 100% of the costs. That is one reason why school districts need to be given more flexibility to increase local tax levies for school operations without a referendum. It is interesting to note that the state of North Dakota covers only 48% of the costs of K-12 education and resulting in North Dakota's property taxes being much higher than property taxes in Minnesota. Minnesota has a long record of helping school districts build new facilities and renovate existing facilities through what is called debt service equalization aid. This aid helped Moorhead complete an extreme makeover of our school facilities. The formula for determining this aid needs to be revised in order for the state to keep its original commitment. I have been working to revise and update the formula that would result in over one million dollars in additional debt service equalization aid to the Moorhead school district. Adequately funding education is a top priority for Minnesota. ■

9B LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

**Dayna Olson, Republican
Glyndon, Minn.**

What are your views on restoring Local Government Aid to 2000 levels?

There is no doubt in my mind that, with our deficit, some hard decisions will need to be made within the next legislative session; however, I would not propose restoring LGA to 2000 levels.

What are your views on expanding access to Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association insurance?

It depends on how and to whom MCHA insurance would be expanded. Any legislation to expand access would need to be carefully inspected before I would support it. In general, I don't feel that a government-run system is best in terms of quality or affordability for Minnesotans.

I would prefer to promote legislation that would:

- Offer high-quality, affordable health care that is available to all and give citizens control over their own health care decisions.
- Expand the availability of HSAs and promote tax credits for people that want to participate in HSAs.
- Reduce the factors and excessive mandates that increase costs.
- Keep the government out of the doctor's office.

What three things would you do to alleviate homelessness in our area?

Homelessness is a broad topic reaching many different groups of a community and cannot adequately be discussed in a short list of three items; however, I believe the following list addresses some specific issues of the current time:

First, I would support/promote legislation that would balance our budget and ensure that our hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely so we can afford to take care of those who struggling to find and kept their jobs and make a life for themselves and their children.

Second, I would support organizations (especially those that are private or those that operate under a private/public partnership for funding) that specialize in finding real-world solutions to homelessness.

Finally, I would support/promote legislation that would lower property taxes to ensure that those who still own their homes can afford to remain in them.

How would you plan to adequately fund Minnesota school districts to meet the needs of all students?

First, I will promote equality of funding to support our local schools, rather than promoting legislation that provides greater funding to the metropolitan areas of Minnesota.

Second, I believe that parents are ultimately responsible for the education and well-being of their children. Therefore, if parents feel a private or home school environment will better serve their child, I believe they have the right to do so. As such, I will support/promote legislation that will give tax credits to parents who currently pay for private, charter, and home schools.

Finally, I will support/promote legislation that provides tax credits for scholarships for low-income families. ■

**Rep. Paul Marquart , DFL
Dilworth, Minn.**

What are your views on restoring Local Government Aid to 2000 levels

Property taxes have gone up 81% on homeowners since 2002 - an increase of \$2.7 billion statewide. The cuts to Local Government Aid (LGA) are a main reason property taxes have skyrocketed since 2002. As the former mayor of Dilworth, I realize the importance of LGA to rural

cities in keeping property taxes affordable for rural property owners. The cuts to LGA of over \$700 million since 2003 have increased the burden of property taxes on senior citizens, families, farmers and small business owners. LGA is the "lifeline" for rural communities in providing property tax relief and maintaining important services such as public safety, fire protection and street maintenance. In 2009 the Legislature increased LGA by \$42 million a year. It is very important that we work to restore LGA to our rural cities.

What are your views on expanding Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association insurance?

Having health insurance not only helps the family with health insurance but also helps the entire community and state. Over 300,000 Minnesotans lack health insurance - including 70,000 children. A family that does not have health insurance sees poorer school performance for the children, a weaker workforce when parents need to miss work for acute illnesses and higher insurance premiums for all Minnesotans to pay for uncompensated care in our state's hospitals. The quality of life of the entire state is improved when we can provide health care coverage to a greater number of families. Expanding the Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association would do just that.

What three things would you do to alleviate homelessness in our area?

Each night over 9,300 people are homeless in Minnesota. That number is unacceptable. This issue can be addressed three ways.

One, there needs to be a more prominent partnership between the state, developers and communities to construct and provide more affordable housing.

Second, we need to assure that we provide health insurance for more Minnesota residents. A lack of insurance puts a huge financial strain on individuals and puts residents one major illness away from economic distress.

Three, community groups - public, private and non-profit - need to develop a unified strategy to address the causes of homelessness and implement ways to reduce homelessness in our communities.

How would you plan to adequately fund Minnesota school districts to meet the needs of all students?

One of the top priorities of the state of Minnesota is to provide a top-notch education for our students. A highly educated workforce prepared for the global economy of the 21st-Century will be the fuel to a robust Minnesota economy in the future. Minnesota has not been living up to its' commitment to adequately fund education. Instead local property owners have been asked to foot more and more of the education bill through excess levy referendums. School property taxes have doubled (an increase of one billion dollars) since 2002 as 90%

of our state's school districts are relying on local levy referendums. Education should be funded through a uniform statewide process, not by local property taxes. Funding education on the local level will lead to great disparities in the future between the wealthy school districts in the metro area and rural Minnesota. That is not fair to rural Minnesota. There needs to be an increase in education funding from the state while relieving the burden on property taxpayers. ■

CLAY COUNTY COMMISSION

Ben Brunsvold District 1
Moorhead, Minn.

How do you propose to use social services funds more efficiently?

Social services is under more financial pressure than any other county department. The services to be provided are largely dictated by the State of Minnesota, which is also largely the funding source. Our county role is management of the social services programs which is ably provided by the social services management team. When State budgets are tight the first programs to be cut are services to citizens who need only modest assistance to become self sufficient. The county needs to fill the gap in early identification and assistance citizens who could be helped before their problems become larger.

How would you assure that county planning will protect our environment?

We have a strong ordinance and a zoning and planning committee that is committed to enforcing our ordinance.

How do you propose to alleviate overcrowding at the county jail?

We are in the 3rd year of a planning process, which will lead to construction of a modern jail with added capacity. The difficulty we have is how to build and staff a new jail without breaking the bank and crowding out other important county programs. Most counties that simply build new larger jail facilities find that the court system will almost immediately fill up the new jail no matter how large the county makes it. Simply building a new and bigger facility must be accompanied by other efforts to prevent crime and divert offenders into programs that work to direct the offender back to responsible behaviors. ■

Sonia Mayo Hohnadel District 5
Moorhead, Minn.

How do you propose to use social service funds more effectively?

We already know that many of the programs and services provided by the county are state and federal mandated. This includes the implementation and

spending of funds. But I would propose in an effort to make our social service funds stretch to their maximized potential that we be strategic in our planning and perform a major mapping effort as to what is already in place and what we have to do to fill the gaps in services needed. There are for profit, nonprofit, faith-based organizations, foundations, and other groups who are all providing services, some duplicated, that also serve our residents. I believe if the county is able to convene agencies that provide social services and intentionally collaborate, coordinate and partner with many sectors of government and the community to leverage resources and money so that we can come up with a plan to best serve our most vulnerable citizens. In the state of our current economy there will have to be new and innovative approaches so that all of us who want to help provide the essentially needed assistance are cognitive of what is already out there and not use valuable dollars duplicating services. We have to be smart and plan and be aware of what is available in our communities and only use the reduction or elimination of programs or services as a last resort.

How would assure county citizens that the county planning process will protect our environment?

As County Commissioner I will see to it that land use decisions are made with considerations as to the effects on the environment and welfare of our communities. There needs to be a strategic plan in place to protect our natural resources for the next generations to come. Efficient use and increase of renewable energy is essential in our planning. Ordinances that protect our environment need to be protected and enforced. If there is to be economic development, as was done in planning the new schools, we should consider the ecological impact and plan accordingly. In the planning for the schools, green space, water retention ponds, prairie grasses, natural sunlight in the buildings, and energy cost efficiencies were all considered. Any new construction should be responsible in providing their strategies that they will incorporate to assure they will also protect the environment and what conservation strategies they will incorporate before they are granted permission for land use and construction. A major public awareness campaign for county residents who truly do not understand the importance the protection and conservation of our natural resources is, needs to be developed and a marketing plan needs to be established so that residents are aware and know the consequences if we do not make protecting our environment a priority.

How do you propose to alleviate overcrowding at the county jail?

I do not believe this is a good time, economically, to build a new facility. I believe that taxpayers are already overburdened and even though the need is great, at this time other alternatives need

to be researched and proposed. I believe implementing more diversion programs to help those who suffer chemical addictions, such as increasing the dollars allotted and numbers served by the drug courts should be considered. With the drug courts, more people will be allowed to formulate an accountability plan to the courts, addiction counselors, social workers and their families so that they may find a job, keep their families together, thus not overburdening our social service programs and foster care systems, and be guided to complete the terms put before them by a judge toward building their life back together and providing for their family. Programs to help reduce crime such as Neighborhood Watch/Community Policing need to be well marketed and a significant outreach effort made to help deter crime in neighborhoods needs to be implemented. There needs to be major cooperation and research to find what are the best strategies and best practices to alleviate overcrowding. Are there other actions we can take for nonviolent offenders, and are there other alternatives to incarceration that could be handled during pretrial or in plea agreements for these nonviolent offenders, thus keeping them out of jail. Another question is, are we moving those who need to move to another location or to state or federal prison expeditiously so that we make room, as we need it. I would just hope other alternatives could be explored until the economics of our residents and county are better suited to take on the cost of building a new jail. ■

Grant Weyland District 5
Moorhead, Minn.

How do you propose to use social services funds more efficiently?

A commissioners job is to over-see county operations, As commissioner I would work with Social Service professional staff to ensure that citizens needs are being met, this is a complex issue as many programs that are delivered by the county are state or federally mandated. Receiving and maintaining adequate state and federal funds is critical to the continued delivery of vital services. I will work with state and federal officials to see these needs are met.

How would you assure that county planning will protect our environment?

As a county commissioner I would insist that the county adhere to all state and federal regulations relative to environmental concerns, the planning process is extremely important to all county residents and critical to the future to ensure that Clay county remain the outstanding place to live that is has always been. I would seek I input from citizens impacted by the planning process and strive to find that balance that meets the needs of our citizens, addresses developers issues and protects our environment as decisions are made.

How do you propose to alleviate overcrowding at the county jail?

The issues facing Clay County relative to the jail are significant. The current jail was built well over forty years ago and has gone through many renovations over the years to see that it is compliant with state standards, here again the state mandates these standards and the county must comply. The prospect of a new jail is an expensive one for tax payers, many people are currently involved in determining the feasibility of this project and it is important that Clay citizens are kept informed regarding the jail issue and that they support whatever decisions that are made as a Clay County Commissioner I will keep citizens informed regarding this important issue and will work with law-enforcement, prosecutors and judges to seek new and innovative alternatives to incarceration in the county jail. I support home-monitoring programs, intensive supervision by probation officers and drug courts that are currently being utilized to minimize this problem, I would also collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions to seek alternatives. ■

The following candidates did not return the questionnaire:

Wayne Ingersoll **District 1**
Jerry Waller **District 2**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 152
(Vote for four candidates.)

Rebecca A. Blanshan
Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the school district be lowered?

Find the best, long term solution to the high energy costs at Horizon Middle School and Reinertson Elementary, secure funding for that solution and move promptly to implement the plan. Solutions must be based on the long range benefits not just up front costs.

Generally, put climate control processes in place to control the use of the heating and air conditioning systems in all buildings depending upon the occupancy of the building.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

I support the school district's deep commitment to providing every student a quality education regardless of that student's gender, race, religion, economic status or achievement level. I specifically support the use of Professional Learning Communities where teachers and administrators work together to share concerns, assessments, ideas and solutions to assure the adequate learning of every student. The District must also collaborate with juvenile and social service agencies dedicated to serving all students in need in this

community.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

If the budget allowed, I would support the return of daily physical education for every student through the 9th grade. Understanding that this may be an unreasonable expectation, it is essential the Physical Education curriculum teaches students how to incorporate healthy living in their daily lives. It is also important to have intramural programs at both the middle school and high school levels to provide every student the opportunity to participate in physical activity. ■

Lisa Erickson
Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the school district be lowered?

I do not wish to micro manage the staff of the Moorhead district and as a board member it has been my experience that we have excellent people in place doing a terrific job bring forth recommendations to the School Board for consideration. An example of this is the recent energy audit done by the Center for Energy and Environment concerning Horizon Middle School. The implementation of three items at a projected cost of \$37,300.00 would have an anticipated cost savings of \$63,969.00 was presented and approved. An additional two improvements, with larger price tags, are being further reviewed.

Additional discussion including the evaluation and feasibility of controlled room temperatures throughout the entire district will need to be assessed. Bus transportation and route configuration is carefully monitored and this district is making use of the tax payers money in the most prudent fashion. I say this because upon becoming a board member I soon realized there are so many state and federal regulations that must be followed and often have financial ramifications.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

The on going professional development of staff through district funding is one way that diversity issues are presented along with ideas on how to continue to improve the cohesiveness in the Moorhead School District. Also, as a member of the district Staff Development Committee we have asked members of our committee involved with the Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) program for a proposal for funding and programming.

There are several board policies that come to mind that as a current board member, but even more important as a member of our community, I fully support. A few examples are:

- Policy 501 Equal Education Opportunity
- Policy 502 Student Disability Non-discrimination

Policy 503 Student Parental, Family and Marital Status Nondiscrimination

Policy 570 Prohibition of Harassment and Violence

Policy 578 Prohibiting Intimidation and Bullying

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

Facilities and time are two factors that are always a struggle in managing a students school day. The elementary students currently have daily opportunities for physical activity. The struggle of additional requirements at the middle school with the current course load would have to be at the expense of another class. One of my undergraduate degrees was in physical education and I realize the importance of activity but the middle school student has a full day with current course requirements. The high school is able to offer some elective courses in physical education, however, student demand and class space dictates the number of courses beyond the required physical education requirements that can be fit in the current schedule. ■

CINDY FAGERLIE
Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the school district be lowered?

A suggestion from the Recommissioning Report of Horizon Middle School was for the district to establish a district-wide standard for comfort conditions. I expect a school board policy will be adopted that would establish consistent room temperatures for heating and cooling, and define various modes of operation depending on building needs and occupation. By doing this I believe the school district will recognize additional energy savings. I do think the issue of energy savings is more complex in a public facility versus an individual's home due to the on-going daily needs of these facilities.

I would like to add that the energy issues at Horizon Middle School are being addressed and we anticipate a 3 year return on investment from energy savings. The energy usage at Horizon Middle School is a very unfortunate situation that has occurred but one which we must address in a proactive manner, and I believe we are doing that.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

I fully support our school district policy #609, Inclusive Educational Program, which essentially states our school district will establish and maintain educational programs that are inclusive of cultural diversity, which not only includes ethnicity but also gender, age and persons with disabilities. The policy ensures that our educational programs support the integration of multicultural, gender-fair concepts, and emphasize individual

contributions to society and roles of individuals with disabilities. It also states we will be sensitive to the “whole learner,” provide for staff development, and curriculum development and review to enhance programming. I believe our school district continually strives to become a place that sincerely supports inclusive education in every-day school life. From the professional staff development, such as Martin Luther King Day and Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity (SEED) workshops, to the student programs of Character Counts, Courage Retreat, Respect Retreat, Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) that is teaching students to be respectful, responsible and safe, we work hard to model and teach inclusion. But, there is always room for improvement - in anything we do, and in collaboration with area agencies and stakeholders (which includes students) we can become an even better school district.

Also, I believe it is up to all parents to positively teach their children that our world is made up of many different people who think, act and hold different beliefs, but that we can appreciate these differences, learn from them and grow as individuals.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

Physical education classes are required for students of Moorhead Area Public Schools thru the 10th grade, and elementary students are granted recess as well. With the current demands on the school day I do not see where additional time can be added to the school schedule for more physical activity. I believe another option students have to increase physical activity is to become active through high school and intramural activities. However, I recognize that transportation can be a problem but options have been provided. I also believe that today's families could incorporate more activities into their daily routines that would not only increase physical activity but total wellness (e.g. social, physical, mental) for the entire family. ■

Yoke Sim Gunaratne Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs of the school district be lowered?

While the price of gas cannot be controlled, energy costs of the Moorhead School District can be lowered by careful investigation and monitoring of how energy is being used in each of the seven school buildings. Currently Horizon Middle School has very high energy usage compared to other educational buildings according to the ‘Decommissioning Report’ which I have read. The report has recommended several ways to reduce the high usage through Energy Conservation Opportunities (ECOs) such as: (1) Supply fans in the Air Handling Units which are oversized be reduced to match that of the

return fans, (2) Improve the efficiency of the hot water system by reducing the use of the glycol system pump since its full capacity is not needed. This includes introducing two modes of operation ‘No School’ and ‘After School’ since the current controls only has one mode of operation. It is said that the School District will save \$141,227 annually by implementing all the proposed ECOs even though it will cost \$422,600 to implement them. However the payback for the whole project is three years.

Other energy savings to consider can range from (1) renting or having cars that have lower fuel usage, (2) replacing lights which are more energy saving where necessary, (3) education for all School's staff, employees and students on how to keep energy costs down.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

Moorhead School District should continue to include in its staff professional development program, the opportunities to attend ongoing diversity training/cultural competency. I strongly support the allocation of a budget to continue with 'Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity' (SEED) seminars which were offered since 1990 to educate teachers about incorporating all aspects of diversity (e.g. age, gender, race, disabilities, etc.) in their curriculum. As one of the SEED facilitators, I would assist in developing a SEED curriculum for youth. I would also encourage teachers to use free ‘Teaching Tolerance’ materials in the classrooms.

Having served six years on the Moorhead Curriculum & Instruction Committee, I would strongly encourage representation from various diverse groups to offer diverse ideas and perspectives on the Committee. The Moorhead School Human Rights Committee, which I currently serve, will also provide some oversight on the School's strategic plans and curriculum. I hope that the race achievement grant received last fall will continue indefinitely to encourage ‘students of color’ to actively explore their career interests and develop action plans to continue further education.

I would like to organize a multicultural parents committee with the goals to (1) support parents who have youth who are at risk of dropping out from school, (2) discuss and address any issues and challenges regarding the School District (3) educate, inform or assist parents about School's policies, resources, activities etc.

I would also like to propose establishing an ‘Intercultural Club’ with involvement from various ethnic groups. The Club will serve as venue to interact, share ideas, and learn about world cultures, play games and physical activities from all over the world.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

Currently, students in elementary schools have at least 30 minutes of

physical activity daily, in middle schools, its three months and in high schools, its one credit for physical activity. Consequently, more needs to be done at the middle and especially high school level.

Moorhead School District has a wellness policy since 2006 to encourage healthy eating and physical activity for its staff who could act as good role models for their students. The wellness policy encourages classroom teachers to provide short physical breaks between lessons or classes. My suggestion is to include an annual report listing what has been done to track and measure the outcomes of the wellness policy so there is more accountability for the policy implementation.

I have served for six years on Moorhead Community Education Advisory Council and would like to see it take a more active role in partnering with businesses, community agencies, and parents to organize more after-school activities such as intra mural games e.g. basket ball, volley ball, aerobics, dances or any other activities identified by the students. Through grants and contributions, free activities can be offered to encourage greater participation by low income students.

In addition to increased physical activities and events, teachers and staff should continue to promote nutrition education, offer more healthy foods and beverages for breakfasts and lunches and at vending machines. ■

David Schuman Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the school district be lowered?

A recent audit (September) of the schools in Moorhead has resulted in recommendations that could greatly reduce the cost to heat and cool the schools and minimize waste. I support these recommendations, as they will save the school district thousands of dollars and to me appear to be the most cost-effective solution to the current problems. Additionally, turning lights off, reducing the amount of heat/cooling that is used during off hours (through the use of automated timer systems, perhaps) all adds up and helps as well. As it relates to the price to fuel vehicles I believe it would be a good idea to review how the bus routes are scheduled to make sure they are being used in the most efficient manner, as well as looking at how we are using school supplied vehicles (including buses) for after school activities and sporting events. This does not mean we are not doing these things in the most efficient manner but it is always a good idea to revisit these issues from time to time.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

As it is stated on Moorhead's Schools webpage “The mission of the Moorhead

School District is to develop the maximum potential of every learner to thrive in a changing world". It is our responsibility to provide a safe place for all students to learn and an environment in which they feel comfortable in doing so. I feel this requires an educational process for all involved including faculty, students, family and community. Training is necessary for the faculty to help them create a safe and successful environment, while holding accountable those who jeopardize such an environment. Students need to be taught the value of diversity, without over-emphasizing the issues - as that can be damaging as well. Family and community education classes can be offered to help those outside of the school understand the programs and the design of what is being done within the school, and to offer the opportunity for them to have a voice in how it is structured.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

Currently, classes are offered that provide education on how to have a balanced diet. Physical Education classes are available to all students, and extra-curricular athletic programs are available for students to join. This provides an appropriate foundation of healthy living habits without dictating what a student does once the school day is over. I think it is important for students to learn self-control in all areas of their lives, including meal times and physical (or lack there-of) activities. I think we should be careful that the school is not overstepping its bounds in interfering outside of the classroom, as the function of the school is to teach. I feel gymnasiums and workout rooms should be open to students after school, even if they are not in a sport – as long as it does not interfere with the organized events.

Also, community education or meetings should be offered to help parents and community members understand the opportunities available to their children and to give their suggestions and concerns. ■

Mike Siggerud
Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the school district be lowered?

As energy costs continue to rise, it is imperative that our schools be as cost-effective as possible. Every dollar spent on operating costs, including utilities, is a dollar not spent in the classroom.

Energy audits have been completed in our newest buildings, and engineers have designed plans and procedures that will improve our efficiency significantly, with

many suggested improvements that have a relatively short payback period. I will support these recommendations.

The other side of energy management is the awareness of the reduced costs that can result from actions each of us can take. Simply remembering to shut off the lights when a room is not in use and eliminating the use of unnecessary appliances, when done on a school-wide scale, can generate significant savings for the district.

I see the promotion of school-wide conservation of energy as an opportunity for our students to understand our dependency on energy, the importance of conservation and prudent use, and how the wisdom of our decisions on energy use today can affect our future.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

I believe diversity must be infused into all subjects and all grade levels, in a manner that enables students to understand and be comfortable with the cultural, racial, religious, political, generational and social variety that brings richness to American society. Understanding and appreciating diverse outlooks, opinions and the connection they have with our daily lives is critical as we prepare for an economy that is far more global than any we have ever known.

It is an unfortunate fact of American education that many of the texts and materials available to schools are written from an almost exclusively western cultural viewpoint. Care must be taken that our students know and fully appreciate the many contributions of the multitude of global societies, as well as the contributions of the great Americans of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

It is also vitally important that materials we choose and the instructional methods we employ are sufficiently sensitive to the diverse social, cultural and economic diversity of our school. In the interest of fairness and accuracy, diversity be seriously considered when choosing and administering testing materials and interpreting the results.

Finally I also endorse efforts, wherever possible, to consider diversity when making staffing decisions. I believe students reap rich benefits from the mentorship of professionals who bring different, often unique cultural or social perspectives to teaching and learning.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students?

Our health and physical education teachers, as well as our staff in general,

understand the importance of an active lifestyle and have done great work developing a curriculum and activities that promote a culture of lifetime fitness. This is particularly important work at a time we are facing a national health crisis in the increasing rate of childhood obesity and the associated health risks that go with it, including diabetes.

Our schools have made significant efforts in the promotion and expansion of after-school activities and intramural games available for all students. We have been able to provide fun, sometimes modestly competitive activities for kids that are becoming increasingly popular and compliment the wide variety of competitive activities available to our students. I would hope to see these opportunities continue and expand. ■

Michael Thrasher
Moorhead, Minn.

How can energy costs for the district be lowered?

I support the implementation of all recommendations from the Horizon Energy Audit as presented to the school board on September 8. These improvements alone will result in thousands of dollars in annual savings. I also support the establishment of a district-wide standard on temperature controls and thermostat settings in buildings.

What efforts do you support to increase respect for the diverse school population?

First, a safe and secure school environment must be maintained at all times. Student bullying and intimidation, for any reason, must not be allowed. Second, faculty and support staff should receive ongoing training regarding the needs of diverse learners. Finally, informal events such as multicultural nights or international fairs would promote a welcoming and engaging environment.

How can healthful physical activity be increased for all students.

The school district should continue its active support of the physical education programs and of instructional offerings in health, nutrition and wellness. Effective communication with parents regarding student health goals and objectives is essential. Sponsoring family and community events, such as exercise nights at school facilities or local walk/run events, will help promote physical health for all our constituents. ■

REMEMBER TO VOTE NOVEMBER 4, 2008

For more information about League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley, please contact:the League office: