

## On the subject of...

## *In loco parentis*

by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

# The Aberdeen Advocate

I was recently afforded the opportunity to speak to the local chapter of Rotary International. Of course, writing and speaking are two different challenges. When I write, I carefully pin the words down to the paper so that they cannot scurry off or take off on a tangent of their own. When I speak, I get nervous. One never knows what might just peel off the top of my head and insert itself into conversation where there is, sadly, no “delete” key. However, I am happy to report that, on that Monday, I got through my program with no major gaffs and nobody hurled over-ripe vegetables my way. Therefore, I shall count it as a “win.”

In the course of preparing for my little infomercial for *The Aberdeen Advocate*, I pondered the plight of our school system. You see, I spent a recent Friday morning at the elementary school in Caledonia where one of our granddarlings is enjoying kindergarten this year. While I was there, I couldn’t help noticing the big banner hanging from one of the buildings in celebra-

tion of the fact that Caledonia’s elementary school achieved a Level 5 (Superior Performing) distinction— meaning that in the state testing process, the students there perform at advanced levels. Their test scores are well above average and it is obviously a source of great pride for the school, its students and the citizens of Caledonia. I’m proud for them too. But it makes it all the sadder to return to Aberdeen where the academic levels are lamentable.

I have not spent much time studying the Aberdeen School District. Oh, I write about it from time to time. I speak to teachers and parents, all of whom tell me that they feel trapped and doomed and I share my concerns on that matter with my readers fairly regularly. I’ve not attended a school board meeting. I’ve not joined the PTA, nor have I visited the schools to see what happens and/or doesn’t happen there. I’ve allowed myself a “get

out of jail free” card when it comes to the school system because I don’t have a child who attends school in Aberdeen.

But now I’m here to tell you I have been negligent and wrong-headed. I have forgotten the concept of “*in loco parentis*” which translates from the Latin to, “in the place of parents.” It is an old and almost universally held societal convention which dictates that each adult will assume the duty of protecting children when they are in danger regardless of our biological relationship to them.

You don’t have to be a child’s mother or father to pull them off the railroad tracks and out of the path of an oncoming train. You need not be blood kin to point them in the right direction when they’re lost. As uncomfortable as it might be, you are obliged to shoulder some of the responsibility when they are not being properly edu-

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## Belle Elementary stands out

By Contributing Editor Don Rowe

For the past several weeks, state test scores for Aberdeen High School, Shivers Junior High, Prairie and the Middle School have taken center stage here on the pages of *The Advocate*.

This week, last, but by no means least, Belle Elementary has the spotlight – the only one of Aberdeen’s schools which can boast of being Level 4 Exemplary. And if memory serves me correctly, this is the second year in a row Principal Terry Cox and his staff can claim that honorable distinction.

In addition to test scores which, in some cases, are very close to matching the state average, Belle Elementary’s test results also compare favorably with those of Amory and Monroe County – the only school in Aberdeen’s system to do so. More impressive, however, was the low percentage of students ranked at the lowest proficiency level (minimal) and the high number who tested out at the top level (advanced).

The MCT results for Aber-

deen’s second- and third-graders are as follows:

**Third-grade reading test scores:** State average, 497.2; **Aberdeen, 487.8;** Amory, 509.3; Monroe County, 500.0.

**Third-grade reading test score summary:** Aberdeen’s score was 9.4 points under the state average, 21.5 points below Amory

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# In loco parentis

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cated which is, in my opinion, one of the most dangerous of perils they might ever face.

On the day I spoke to the Rotarians, the superintendent of schools, Dr. Lavon Fluker-Reed, was quick to defend her school system, her teachers and her students. She led me to understand that, in the past, she has felt personally attacked by the words written here in *The Advocate*. I appreciate her candor and am sorry that she misunderstands my position. Let me say this for the record: I attack problems, not people. If, however, someone is silly enough to attempt to defend a broken system, they may find themselves in my crosshairs. I do this not because I have animosity toward any individual, but because they have become an obstacle – they have become part of the problem and, as such, must be overcome. It's nothing personal, Dr. Reed.

*In loco parentis* extends beyond schoolyards and railroad tracks, however. Our obligation to protect young ones stretches out and touches each of the issues we face in Aberdeen today including, oddly enough, property taxes. Here's the theory. If we are paving the way to the future, we have an obligation to protect the property of the generations to come. If we allow the property – and when I use this term I speak of the entire bundle of sticks, not only the land and the house on it, but also the profit-making potential which exists in the possibility of striking gold in the back yard, or selling the whole shebang to a Subaru factory – to lose value on our watch, we have failed in our fiduciary responsibility to our children.

On another note, also attending the September 10<sup>th</sup> Rotary meeting was Aberdeen Alderman Jim Buffington. Mr. Buffington challenged my assertion that property taxes in Aberdeen continue to rise. I recently attended a meeting of the aldermen in which it was stated that taxes were, indeed, going up, if only fractionally. (What part of up isn't up, anyway?) What I did not take the time to discuss with Mr. Buffington that day is the amazing way our property value is assessed and how that assessment compares with the market price. While it is true that the aldermen have no control over the assessment, they can and should adjust the mil-

lage rate to ease the taxpayers' burden. Here we have Buffington making a feeble attempt to defend a system he may NOT have broken, but which he has failed to fix year after year. It seems a shame to spend any energy defending our shattered government when there is so much that could be done to fix what's wrong.

Also, I've mentioned our nasty habit of engaging in corporate cannibalism before. That's what happens when the government in a community becomes one of the major employers. As the number of city jobs increases, so does the taxpayer's expense. The more people we employ in city programs, the more the city must collect from you and me. A local businessman told me just this morning about a novel approach which used to work just fine here in Aberdeen.

Once upon a time back in 1970 or so, he told me the city's water department was run by a crew of four people. When there was a need to do extra or work different from the usual maintenance of the system, the city HIRED local contractors to accomplish the task. By keeping the city's payroll down (and with it, all the benefits including health insurance and pension plans for which the taxpayers pay), local companies were able to provide jobs for their employees and the wheels of commerce turned quite nicely.

There is an old entrepreneurial mantra: "Find a need, then fill it." If you want to start a business of your own, first find something that needs doing, then do it! Here in Aberdeen, though, instead of encouraging free enterprise, our city fathers hire people to mow grass, trim trees, fix potholes and carry all manner of old appliances and furniture to the landfill. In other communities, these little duties are either taken care of by the citizens themselves, as in hauling junk to the dump, or are done by local contractors who then bill the city for their services. Are there not businesses here among us which actually perform these services? How does it benefit the taxpayers to shoulder these

extra payroll expenses when there are perfectly legitimate tax-paying businesses here in town who could benefit from this extra work? Would they not create extra private-sector jobs and in so doing strengthen our entire economy?

This, reader friends, is what the city's accountant Dale Pierce means when he talks about trimming the payroll. Each year he tells the aldermen to cut the workforce. Each year he pleads with them to eliminate jobs by attrition. That is obviously not something the aldermen are willing to do. Why? As long as they are providing "jobs" for their constituents, they remain re-electable. This thin guise is meant to hide the highly illegal and totally unethical act of using taxpayer dollars as campaign currency. Tsk. Tsk. Tsk.

So, when the next generations step up to the job of running Aberdeen and its school system, will we have done our part to preserve their legacy? Will there be anything left to manage when we've finished? At the rate we are squandering the resources and poisoning the potential for growth and change, my guess is *nada*.



## Your Municipal Officials

**Cecil Belle, Mayor**

**369-4165**

**Ward 1 Alderman Alonzo Sykes**

**369-7705**

**Ward 2 Alderman Cloyd Garth**

**369-5734**

**Ward 5's OTHER Alderman Willie Cook**

**369-9156**

**Ward 4 Alderman Brunson Odom**

**369-2246**

**Ward 5 Alderman Jim Buffington**

**369-4985**

# Belle Elementary stands out

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and 12.2 points below Monroe County's schools.

**Third-grade reading proficiency levels:** State – 7.5% minimal, 8.8% basic, 53.5% proficient, 30.2% advanced; **Aberdeen – 7.8% minimal, 7.8% basic, 65.6% proficient, 18.9% advanced;** Amory – 5.6% minimal, 10.2% basic, 39.8% proficient, 44.4% advanced; Monroe County – 7.4% minimal, 6.8% basic, 56.2% proficient, 29.6% advanced

**Third-grade reading proficiency summary:** Only 15.6% of Belle's students fell into the minimal (7.8%) and basic (7.8%) proficiency levels, while 84.5% tested out at the proficient (65.6%) and advanced (18.9%) levels.

**Third-grade language test scores:** State average, 508.0; **Aberdeen, 505.8;** Amory, 507.1; Monroe County, 509.1.

**Third-grade language test score summary:** Aberdeen's score was only 2.2 points under the state average, just 1.3 points behind Amory and only 3.3 points below Monroe County's schools.

**Third-grade language proficiency levels:** State – 5.5% minimal, 11.7% basic, 42.6% proficient, 40.3% advanced; **Aberdeen – 1.1% minimal, 12.4% basic, 51.7% proficient, 34.8% advanced;** Amory – 7.5% minimal, 14.0% basic, 41.1% proficient, 37.4% advanced; Monroe County – 4.3% minimal, 11.1% basic, 41.4% proficient, 43.2% advanced.

**Third-grade language proficiency summary:** Only 13.5% of Belle's students fell into the minimal (1.1%) and basic (12.4%) proficiency levels, while 86.5% tested out at the proficient (51.7%) and advanced (34.8%) levels. Aberdeen's minimal percentage (1.1%) was well below the state average of 5.5%, as well as Amory's 7.5% and Monroe County's 4.3%.

**Third-grade math test scores:** State average, 503.3; **Aberdeen, 490.0;** Amory, 513.0; Monroe County, 498.3.

**Third-grade math test score summary:** Aberdeen's score was 13.3 points under the state average, 23 points behind

Amory and only 8.3 points below Monroe County's schools.

**Third-grade math proficiency levels:** State – 2.3% minimal, 6.6% basic, 48.3% proficient, 42.8% advanced; **Aberdeen – 2.3% minimal, 6.8% basic, 56.8% proficient, 34.1% advanced;** Amory – 0.9% minimal, 6.5% basic, 42.1% proficient, 50.5% advanced; Monroe County – 1.9% minimal, 6.2% basic, 51.2% proficient, 40.7% advanced.

**Third-grade math proficiency summary:** Just 9.1% of Belle's students fell into the minimal (2.3%) and basic (6.8%) proficiency levels, while almost 91% (90.9%) tested out at the proficient (56.8%) and advanced (34.1%) levels. Aberdeen's 2.3 minimal percentage matched the state average.

**Second-grade reading test scores:** State average, 470.8; **Aberdeen, 450.9;** Amory, 470.6; Monroe County, 478.7.

**Second-grade reading test score summary:** Aberdeen's score was 19.9 points under the state average, 19.7 points behind Amory and 27.8 points below Monroe County's schools.

**Second-grade reading proficiency levels:** State – 5.5% minimal, 7.8% basic, 56.2% proficient, 30.5% advanced; **Aberdeen – 10.2% minimal, 10.2% basic, 63.8% proficient, 15.7% advanced;** Amory – 8.7% minimal, 9.3% basic, 52.0% proficient, 30.0% advanced; Monroe County – 2.8% minimal, 6.2% basic, 57.3% proficient, 33.7% advanced.

**Second-grade reading proficiency summary:** Over 20 percent (20.4%) of Belle's students fell into the minimal (10.2%) and basic (10.2%) proficiency levels, while 79.5% tested out at the proficient (63.8%) and advanced (15.7%) levels.

**Second-grade language test scores:** State average, 476.7; **Aberdeen, 472.9;** Amory, 464.9; Monroe County, 476.4.

**Second-grade language test score summary:** Aberdeen's score was only 3.8 points under the state average and 3.5 points behind Monroe County, but eight points better than Amory.


**Second-grade language proficiency levels:** State – 5.2% minimal, 14.7% basic, 32.3% proficient, 47.8% advanced; **Aber-**

**deen – 3.2% minimal, 16.7% basic, 34.9% proficient, 45.2% advanced;** Amory – 10.7% minimal, 14.7% basic, 35.3% proficient, 39.3% advanced; Monroe County – 3.4% minimal, 13.5% basic, 36.0% proficient, 47.2% advanced.

**Second-grade language proficiency summary:** Aberdeen's minimal percentage (3.2%) was better than the state average (5.2%), Monroe County (3.4%) and well under Amory (10.7%). Better yet, almost half (45.2%) of Belle's students tested out in the advanced proficiency level.

**Second-grade math test scores:** State average, 454.8; **Aberdeen, 440.4;** Amory, 450.7; Monroe County, 466.4.

**Second-grade math test score summary:** Aberdeen's score was 14.4 points under the state average, 10.3 points below Amory and 26 points under Monroe County's schools.



**Second-grade math proficiency levels:** State – 2.9% minimal, 7.7% basic, 48.8% proficient, 40.6% advanced; **Aberdeen – 0% minimal, 11.0% basic, 61.4% proficient, 27.6% advanced;** Amory – 6.0% minimal, 7.3% basic, 48.7% proficient, 38.0% advanced; Monroe County – 1.1% minimal, 3.4% basic, 42.7% proficient, 52.8% advanced.

**Second-grade math proficiency summary:** Belle Elementary's second-grade math students were the only class in the entire school system to have no one finish in the minimal level.

In summary, if there is a shining light in the Aberdeen school system, it's Belle Elementary – as evidenced by the fact it achieved a Level 4 distinction (one of only 215 in the entire state); it exceeded its growth status (the only Aberdeen school to do so); it had a much lower percentage of students in the minimal proficiency level and a higher percentage in the advanced level; and it also met its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Reading/Language, Math and other indicators. In addition, its Achievement Level Index (ALI) was 400, well above Aberdeen Middle School (365), Prairie (360), Shivers Junior High (332) and Aberdeen High School (269).



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*"If all the rich and all of the church people should send their children to the public schools they would feel bound to concentrate their money on improving these schools until they met the highest ideals."*

*Susan B. Anthony*