

OPINION

Bluegrass Beacon

The outbreak of a 'Raasche' of common sense?

I cannot escape the irony that the same politicians who killed a bill offering more and better educational opportunities for all of Kentucky's 109,000 special-needs students also sponsored an amendment this year that legalized a charter school for a privileged few.

During last year's legislative session, parents of special-needs students took time to drive to Frankfort to attend a House Education Committee meeting.

They went expecting help from legislators charged with improving our education system. They came away with nothing.

Parents watched as the committee, chaired by Paduch Rep. Frank Raasche, fielded complaints from union lackeys who drenched on about the need for labor protections for non-educational school personnel. Committee members complained about school-children eating too many Twinkies and ignoring playground monkey bars.

The smokescreen would bring tears to most Kentuckyans' eyes. These worn issues serve as an oasis for lethargic lawmakers, a spider hole where they can lay up and ignore reality. Yet, Raasche sacrificed the valuable time



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of some committee members and parents, who expected the committee to at least give a hearing Special Needs Scholarship Bill a hearing.

But in the closing moments of this year's General Assembly session, Raasche and others crawled out of their lairs and amended legislation to allow 120 academically gifted students to attend the state's first and only charter school - the Gattson Academy of Math and Science at Western Kentucky University.

You make the call: If we can spend \$2.8 million on this academy so that its

120 students can attend an innovative school that uniquely fits their needs, shouldn't parents of the 668,217 other students in Kentucky's 1,238 public schools have similar opportunities for their children? At the least, shouldn't the state's special-needs students get similar help?

To ignore that logic represents the worst form of discrimination.

Granted, the Gattson Academy attracts exceptionally gifted and mature young people. The academy's students average an ACT math composite score of 29.14, some eight points higher than the average Gattson Academy of Math and Science at Western Kentucky University.

Students live away from home. They maintain their own schedules. Mom isn't there, telling them to turn off the TV and do their homework.

These are exceptionally gifted students who go beyond the caliber of even advanced-placement work," said Corey Aldridge, the academy's assistant director for admissions and public relations. "Challenging students is very much a part of this program. It's a rigorous curriculum."

Aldridge says the academy "works with public school districts to help meet the needs of students."

And that is what school choice is all about: Meeting the needs of students by enhancing, not destroying, public education.

The House voted 94-0 and the Senate voted 35-0 to authorize the Gattson Academy. In doing so, they supported the concept of constructing a way for parents to have choices for their children.

You don't need to be a rocket scientist - or Gattson Academy enrollee - to understand this: Unanimous approval indicates that more and more lawmakers have started to frown on resistance to advancing school choice displayed by Raasche and his labor pals in the state teachers unions, who claim competition would harm public education.

The votes indicate growing faith in parents, who know better than bureaucrats, central offices or politicians, which schools best meet their children's educational needs.

Gattson's students need the rigorous challenges offered by the academy. Many of Kentucky's other "special-needs" students require services to help them overcome learning disabilities and live a successful

life. If Raasche really has seen the light and found school choice salvation, he and his committee will quit obstructing legislation that offers the same kind of opportunities to parents of these children.

Considering the committee's longtime kowtowing to the teachers union and other "educrats," such a change would be miraculous - and confirmation that genuine conversations have taken place.

Jim Waters is the director of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. You can reach him at jw@bipps.org. You can read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.

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LIFESTYLE In The Kitchen With Beth

It's back to my favorite time of year. This spring has been great, so I am back to share some easy recipes with my friends here in Carlisle. Now that I am a mom I love spending time outside with my daughter so cooking a big fall meal might not be something that can be accomplished. Just like so many others who are spending these evenings at the ball field, I am sharing these recipes of things you can make the evening before or in any spare minutes that you might have. These recipes are easy to make and I hope that they taste as good to your family as they do to mine.

Lets begin! The first recipe is a Chicken Salad Recipe. Ingredients: 1 (8 ounce) can pineapple chunks in juice, 2 cups chicken cooked and cut up, 1/4 cup walnut chopped, 1/4 cup sliced almonds, 1/4 cup light mayonnaise, 1 cup asparagus spears cooked & cut into 1 inch pieces. Optional Romane Lettuce.

The second recipe is Chicken Pesto Pasta Salad. Ingredients: 16 oz. box low tie pasta, 10 oz. container refrigerated pesto, 2 cups frozen cut leaf spinach.

The third recipe is Sweet Sweet Strawberries. Ingredients: 32 fresh whole strawberries, large, 11 to 12 ounces cream cheese, softened, 1/2 cup confectioner's sugar, 1/4 teaspoon almond extract, 2 tablespoons semisweet mini chocolate, grated.

Cook pasta according to package directions and drain. Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine the pesto, thawed spinach and lemon juice. Process until it is a well blended mixture.

In a large bowl, combine the pesto mixture, mayonnaise, plain yogurt and milk and whisk until combined. Stir in the chicken, bell peppers, and grape tomatoes. Pour peas on top. Add hot cooked drained pasta and gashwa and stir to combine (the hot pasta will thaw the peas). Refrigerate the mixture for at least two hours before serving, stirring once within those two hours.

Cut a thin slice from the stem end of each strawberry, allowing the berries to stand upright on flattened end. Place the berries, cut side down, on a serving platter. Cut each berry carefully into 4 wedges, cutting almost to, but not through their bottoms. Fan the wedges just slightly, being real careful not to break and then eat the berries aside.

In a mixing bowl, beat together the cream cheese, confectioner's sugar, and almond extract until light and fluffy. Gently fold (mix) in the grated chocolate. Use a teaspoon or decorating bag with decorative tip. Dip the strawberries. If desired, sprinkle with a little more grated chocolate and enjoy.

I hope you enjoy these spring ideas! If you have any idea's on recipes or suggestions that you would like me to write about on my blog, please feel free to email me or send me a letter and I will do everything possible to write something about your idea.

Beth Bond is a certified chef with a culinary arts degree and a hotel/restaurant management degree from Sullivan University in Louisville, Ky. She also has several years' experience in the hospitality and food service industries. She is a press association award-winning photographer and has several years' experience in the newspaper industry. She can be reached by email at bethb@thecarlislemercury.com or by mail at P.O. Box 272, Carlisle, KY 40311.



In The Kitchen With Beth By Beth A. Bond

two or Red Leaf Lettuce.

Directions: First Open and drain the pineapple saving one tablespoon of juice for later. Next mix the chicken, walnuts, almonds and pineapple in medium size bowl. Then take the reserved pineapple juice and mayonnaise and mix it together until it becomes smooth. Toss the mayonnaise mixture with chicken mixture. Gently stir in the pieces of asparagus. Finally, cover the entire mixture and refrigerate it for about 2 hours or until chilled. Serve in any lettuce leaves if you need some type of plate presentation.

Directions: Cook pasta according to package directions and drain. Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine the pesto, thawed spinach and lemon juice. Process until it is a well blended mixture.

In a large bowl, combine the pesto mixture, mayonnaise, plain yogurt and milk and whisk until combined. Stir in the chicken, bell peppers, and grape tomatoes. Pour peas on top. Add hot cooked drained pasta and gashwa and stir to combine (the hot pasta will thaw the peas). Refrigerate the mixture for at least two hours before serving, stirring once within those two hours.

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