

Community Forum

LETTERS ♦ OPINIONS

Choose next school board president carefully

For the past four years, Frederick County has relied upon the experience, intellect and reasoning of Ron Peppe II to guide our school board. Peppe has served as president during a unique time in the Board of Education's history. His tenure spanned from an all-appointed board through the two-year transition into a fully elected one.

Our Opinion

Editorial

Next month, though, will be Peppe's last as president of the board. With a year left in his term, he is giving up the gavel. While he will remain on the board, someone new will take the reins.

Two of the remaining six board members have expressed an interest in succeeding Peppe — Linda Naylor and Bonnie Smith Borsa.

Smith Borsa, scientist, brings a broad range of experience to the board. "I have taught graduate cell biology at Hood College and I have sat in tiny chairs in my son's kindergarten class and cut out valentines," she said shortly after announcing her candidacy in 2002.

The soft-spoken Naylor, a certified public accountant,

said during her 2000 campaign that she wanted to be the "voice for all of Frederick County." For almost three years, that voice has been heard infrequently. But Naylor recently found her voice long enough to tell county commissioners, state delegates and senators, even a city alderman that she is interested in serving as president of the school board.

The president of the board, elected by all seven members, wields little power, Peppe says. He serves more as a team leader, leading the discussions about meeting agendas and appointing liaisons to the various committees. The president is also looked upon as the primary spokesperson for the board, although that is less often the case now with elected members.

While that limited authority has proven to be relatively harmless under Peppe's tenure, the potential exists for a president to influence the board's entire direction, and thereby the direction of education for all our students. It is not a position to be taken lightly. It demands an independent thinker, one who cannot be manipulated easily. The president must be able to react quickly to situations to prevent them from getting out of control.

In her three years on the board, Naylor has failed to exhibit leadership abilities. Before the 2000 election, she was a relative unknown, having never held public office or any leadership position on a private or nonprofit board. The only relevant experience she listed in The Gazette's voters guide that year was her membership in accounting associations.

Whether she is overly cautious or unable to think on her feet, Naylor relies on written statements to react to votes, policies and discussions. She hesitates to stray from the script she writes. How will that play out during a contentious debate at a public meeting?

We are disappointed to hear that Linda Naylor may already have the four votes she needs to be elected president of the Board of Education. Frederick County deserves a more independent, outspoken person in that position.

If Peppe has to step down, then the best alternative would be to replace one articulate, intelligent president with another. We hope that when the votes are cast in December, Bonnie Smith Borsa becomes the next president.