

## “VOICES”

Mr. Bruenn, Grades 3 and 4  
John Lyman School  
(June 1995)

Making choices, sharing opinions, discussing issues, and making decisions are all part of being a student at John Lyman School. Students have a voice in this school. We have a student literary board that makes thoughtful decisions about submitted writings. We have a school senate that discusses issues and works cooperatively to serve the school community. Each day in the classroom students use their voices to express opinions, solve problems, vote on class related issues, and share ideas. Every day students are involved here at John Lyman School, involved not only in academics, but in many other areas. Involved in personal, whole school, and community decision making. Students take active roles as participants. As a teacher and as a citizen in this democracy, I believe in active participation. I believe in using my voice. I want to provide many opportunities for students to use their voices. This year the state of Connecticut helped provide one such opportunity. Several months ago, the Connecticut state senators and representatives were being asked to consider PHB-5060, the act prohibiting smoking in public places of employment. The issue was brought to my attention by Heather Halloran, the mother of one of my students. Soon afterward I brought it up to the class.

“How many of you have been in a public area such as a restaurant or a skating rink or an arcade and have been near people who are smoking?” I asked the class. Nearly every hand went up. Everyone had a story. “Someone blew smoke at me while I was eating at a restaurant. It made the food taste like smoke.” Or, “My mom works at a place where people can smoke and when she comes home, her clothes and hair smell awful! Just like smoke!” Or, “It’s not fair. I don’t smoke, but I can still get hurt by somebody else’s cigarette smoke.” More and more people spoke up. Students shared information with me and with each other about what they knew concerning the effects of cigarette smoking on human beings. We listed as many harmful effects of cigarette smoke and second hand smoke as we could on the blackboard. “If you had an opportunity to help try and get people to stop smoking in public places, would you do it?” I asked. It was unanimous. A resounding “YES!” One student wondered aloud, “But how can we help? What can we do?”

“What can you do? Why, you can use your voice. Use it to tell people who have been elected to help you, your state senators and representatives, that you have an opinion and that you’d like them to listen,” I replied. Students wrote letters to Senators Gaffey and Daily and Representatives Bysiewicz (one of the bill’s co-sponsors) and Altobello to express their opinions about public smoking and asked them to support the bill. The students received letters from their respective legislators thanking them for writing and sharing their thoughts. Although the bill was eventually killed in committee and the senators and representatives were never able to vote on it, students seemed to think their efforts were worthwhile. “Maybe people will try a non-smoking bill again someday,” one student said. “We can write more letters,” said another. I hope that students will continue to be actively involved and remember to use their voices.