

Capital Comment Blog

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“Mrs. Bernanke, Can We Have Recess?”

By Margaret Chadbourn Published Monday, October 26, 2009

While Federal Reserve chairman **Ben Bernanke** shepherds the nation through a financial storm, his wife, **Anna Bernanke**, is quietly navigating her own full-time project—to open a new private school.

The proposed school, Chance Academy, will offer an arts-oriented curriculum to prepare inner-city students for college. It was intended to open this fall at Joe's Movement Emporium, a community arts center in Mount Rainier. Those familiar with Bernanke's proposal say the building contract fell through at the last minute and she's looking at other options for a site. According to these sources, the launch is being funded by the Bernanke family's own money.

Apparently, a dinner more than a year ago with **Kathleen Kennedy Townsend** helped plant the seed: Townsend, a former Maryland lieutenant governor and daughter of **Robert F. Kennedy**, told Anna Bernanke about Touchstones Discussion Project, a nonprofit that aims to help students think independently.

“She wanted to explore new methods of teaching where students are collaborators in their own education,” says Touchstones cofounder and president **Howard Zeiderman**.

Since coming to Washington with her husband from Princeton in 2004, Bernanke—a longtime educator who declined to talk about her project—has taught Spanish at the National Cathedral School and the César Chávez charter school on Capitol Hill.

“Anna is clearly an advocate for nontraditional education that gives the kids all the academics they need by providing both the community experience and life lessons within the school setting,” says **Liesel Flashenberg**, a director on the new school's board and founder of Through the Kitchen Door, a local nonprofit that teaches at-risk immigrant and low-income youths and adults cooking skills mixed with lessons in budgeting and planning.

Chance—which is still accepting applications for its inaugural class—could start next year with

sixth grade, adding one level each year until the 12th. Tuition will range from \$100 to \$500 per month on a sliding scale.

Luckily for her, now that her husband has been reappointed and is likely to be reconfirmed by the Senate to another term as Fed chair, Anna Bernanke has plenty of time left in Washington to get her school up and running.

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