

GUEST OPINION

Mequon-Thiensville schools deliver outstanding education to students

Recall attempt won't help students as district recovers from pandemic

By Angelina Cicero

Our local school district has made Mequon and Thiensville a magnet for families looking for a thriving place to live, adding to the value of our homes and thereby helping to keep our taxes low and our community strong.

Nevertheless, last week my husband received an email titled, "Restore Educational Excellence in MTSD!" Instead of offering positive inspiration, this heading delivers a negative, underhanded, and untrue accusation. The unnamed senders imply that MTSD's world-class educational program has diminished in quality. This is a false premise — one that insults the hard work, tenacity, and achievement of our exceptional students: young aspirants who consistently achieve impressive results in academia, arts, sports, and community service.

During seasons of severe budget cuts, during times of prosperity, during a global pandemic, during peace and turmoil, MTSD delivers students an outstanding educational experience.

The teaching staff is exemplary and the students are highly motivated.

In our schools, children learn to think deeply. They not only acquire knowledge but also learn transferable skills, engage in inquiry, conduct research, produce and publish all forms of art, and break records on courts and fields. They become critical thinkers, problem solvers, contributors, and leaders. Our students earn scholarships, gain entrance to the colleges of their dreams, and start their adult lives with high standards for themselves because they have learned from their families and their schools

what they are capable of doing and whom they are capable of becoming.

Emerging scholars, capable but reluctant learners, special education students, gifted students, troubled teenagers, school lovers and school haters — all students learn and grow in our classrooms.

I have taught English at Homestead High School for the past two decades, devoting my life to the children and families of this community. With my credentials and experience, I could teach anywhere in the world at any school. I choose to teach at MTSD. I am also proud to have one Homestead graduate and another student in the district. Homestead is a unique and amazing place, particularly because of our strong K-12 program and commitment to educational excellence.

As an AVID demonstration school, we have hosted hundreds of teachers from other schools who come to witness our instructional model. Alumni come back to thank us, and they tell us that the peers they encounter at their colleges are just as smart as they are but often do not know how to think for themselves, write original thesis statements for their papers, or lead in group projects. Ours do. They have an edge.

Academic rigor remains the cornerstone of MTSD. Our students continue to significantly exceed expectations on every measure used to judge schools: internal and external. To address two other unwarranted accusations, we have always met the state mandated requirements for instructional minutes, and every school in the state has seen the impact of the pandemic on test scores and failure rates. This

should come as no surprise considering the disruption they have endured, which has affected every aspect of their home and school lives. We have yet to see the full data from this year, but like usual, I am confident our students did extremely well.

Additionally, under the leadership of our School Board, MTSD earned the distinction of Moody's Aaa bond rating, deeming the district one of the top three most fiscally responsible schools in the state. Our administrative team led decisively and responsively during the pandemic, ensuring that all families had choices they were comfortable with, that students were safe, and that the doors were open when many schools' doors were closed.

New people wanting to serve on the School Board, bringing new perspectives and even calling for change, are essential to a healthy community. That's how democracy works. However, the anonymous MTSD recall team, whomever they are, have chosen a critical, divisive approach. I have to wonder why. What we need, what our students need, is a community unified to support them in the aftermath of the most significant challenge to their education they will likely ever have to face.

Now, more than ever, I hope the citizens of Mequon and Thiensville can rally together to advocate for a path forward in unity, with kids' needs, not adults' agendas, at the center.

(Angelina Cicero is an English teacher at Homestead High School. She lives in Mequon.)