

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Former School Board presidents: Recall would jeopardize district success

To the editor:
It has been our privilege to serve the community as presidents of the MTSD Board of Education. As residents of Mequon-Thiensville with this unique perspective, we feel compelled to address the effort to recall four School Board members.

While we have not always agreed on how to solve issues facing our district, it is the politicization and distortion of facts by those behind the recall effort that unites us in our belief that this recall is NOT in the best interests of the students, parents, or taxpayers of Mequon-Thiensville. It is a threat to the success MTSD has enjoyed since its inception in 1972.

Above all, we are deeply concerned about the destabilizing impact a change of this magnitude will have on the board's ability to carry out its duties for the betterment of ALL children in the district. It has been our experience that issues are best addressed in a thoughtful and open-minded manner by board members who make decisions without a predetermined agenda or partisan plan.

Wendy Francour, Chris Schultz, Akram Khan, and Erik Hollander are board members who serve with honesty and integrity. Their governance is grounded in the principles we have shared throughout the years. If the voters wish to change members of the board when their term expires, that process should proceed at regular spring elections when all residents are focused on real issues — not manufactured ones.

We urge the community to get the facts before voting and consider the consequences of an unwarranted, abrupt change to our well-functioning board. Such an unprecedented change would jeopardize the incredible success of our district — the very reason so many seek to reside in our community.

Voting for the incumbents is in the best interest of our children and our community.

MTSD Board of Education past presidents

David Hase (1973-1994)
Mequon
Peter Stone (1994-2009)
Mequon
Suzette Urbashich (1997-2014)
Mequon
Stephanie Clark (2012-2017)
Mequon
Kathryn Houpt (2013-2019)
Mequon
Krista Brookman (2017-2020)
Mequon

Impressions from a recall door-knocker

To the editor:
We have been Mequon residents for 38 years, sent our three children through Mequon schools and were pleased with their education and how well they were prepared for college.

When I heard about the erosion of the performance in our schools in the 15-plus years since our last child graduated from Homestead, I decided to get involved in the recall movement.

After knocking on countless doors, sending emails and making phone calls to spread the message to our residents and gathering over 100 signatures, I came home with two messages. One, over 75% of the people I spoke with signed the recall petitions and were as appalled as I was to hear the statistics about our schools. Two, I recall two visits that stunned and saddened me. I spoke with two young couples, each including a Mequon-Thiensville teacher, who said they would like to sign the recall petitions to help improve our schools but they would lose their jobs if they signed. Let that sink in.

Our school system is clearly broken when those who are elected to lead it have failed to respond to the concerns of the community. These systemic issues will not change until action is taken at the school board level.

ship like water in a foundation. This will only result in paralyzing institutions unable to adjust to a changing world, leaving our global adversaries nodding knowingly as the United States of America fades into a chapter of a history book.

Chad Winterfield
Mequon

Support challengers in recall election

To the editor:
For the past several weeks, the News Graphic has published dozens of letters from citizens from Mequon, Thiensville and even Oregon supporting the present Mequon-Thiensville School Board members. What is missing from these supporters' letters? No one has addressed the real problems that the present School Board is responsible for: No one talks about outcomes in the District: Early reading, minus 12%, ACT success, minus 15%, engagement, minus 17%. These numbers are comparing 2020 vs. 2016.

These dismal numbers occurred during the same time the tax levy increased 19% per student. These numbers are not sustainable. Lower test scores, increased taxation and a decreased enrollment but we praise the present School Board for doing an excellent job? If this School Board were a corporate business, the stockholders (us) would throw them out the streets. That is exactly what Restore MTSD is doing. Since the School Board can increase taxes as they wish, within the Wisconsin state limits, they think they are unaccountable to no one.

These citizens who support Restore MTSD candidates Scarlett Johnson, Kris Kittell, Charles Lorenz and Cheryle Rehholz are exercising their rights in this recall election. I fully support these candidates.

Roy Wetzel
Former village president
Thiensville

Respect fellow neighbors and business owners

To the editor:
I believe in civil discourse, collaboration and compromise to settle any difference. While I am against the recall, I am also against any lingering resentment after the election — on November 3, we will all still be neighbors, same as we are today.

To that end, I ask all of you, please do not send any local businesses for participating in this recall process. River Club, Field House, and Shully's held or are holding events — I stand by them and still support these businesses. Kumon is owned by a School Board member — I stand by them and support this business. Business owners make decisions with many stakeholders in mind, one of which is their customer base, but also necessary revenue or cash flow, especially coming off a year of likely intermittent business!

I ask all of you to respect those that write letters to the editor. No one deserves to be called and grilled about their personal opinions. I ask all of you to respect any signs on private property. Signs should be posted with owner permission, and those owners should then be left alone. We each have opinions. Please respect your neighbors'.

We are stronger when respect is our first response. Mequon is stronger when local businesses thrive and feel supported. Please, no matter your opinion of the recall, reach out to these businesses and pledge your ongoing patronage.

Nancy Urbani
Mequon

Former municipal leaders: Recall isn't way to address school issues

To the editor:
Mequon and Thiensville voters: We urge you to vote for the School Board incumbents in the upcoming recall election. We are all past Mequon mayors who currently live in Mequon and a past president of Thiensville. One of us was a longtime superintendent of the Mequon-Thiensville School District and another a longtime School Board member, both of whom served long before these disputes.

Each of us who was or is a Mequon mayor stayed out of School Board politics while in office. We believe municipalities and schools should be separately and independently run. The current mayor is not speaking for the city and specifically is not taking a public position regarding any of the issues presented. Rather, we all object to the use of recall elections for these purposes.

Dan Abendorth
Mequon mayor, 2013-2019

Christine Nuernberg
Mequon mayor, 1998-2010
Member, M-T School Board, 1973-1991

Curt Gielow
Mequon mayor, 2010-2013

Connie Pukaite
Mequon mayor, 1986-1992

Karl Hertz
Thiensville president, 2006-2012
Superintendent, M-T School District, 1984-1996

John Wirth
Mequon mayor, 2019-present

Current MTSD board doing outstanding job

To the editor:
As a former MTSD student (HHS class of 2011) listening to the banter between the political divide and the petition to recall four members of the School Board, I'm reminded of something my former therapist told me: Just because someone says something louder and more often, that doesn't make it true.

With that said, the people looking to recall the members of the School Board can talk all they want, as loud as they want, but whatever they say doesn't make it true — we need to look at the facts of the situation.

So, what are the facts of the current situation? In November 2019, MTSD was ranked 2nd in public schools in the state. Just like when I was a student, the school district continues to be an excellent resource for education for our students. Let's keep it that way with the help of our current board members because they really are doing an outstanding job.

Let's also keep in mind that whatever deficits that may have come up within the last year and a half have happened to school districts across the country. As a community, we must remember the fact that we are in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic. Unprecedented meaning no one has been in this position before. Everyone is doing their best given the circumstances.

My U.S. history teacher at Homestead (Ben Sloma) taught me something I will never forget: Be an educated voter. Doing your research and voting are part of your civic responsibilities. Find more information to support our school district through Support Mequon-Thiensville Schools or https://supportmtsd.com/.

Thank you to all of the wonderful men and women who have gone above and beyond to serve our school district while continuing to fight back against the political divide unfortunately being sown by so many in our community.

Becca Reinholz
Mequon

Vote to keep current MTSD School Board

To the editor:
Remember a time when school board meetings were free from the public hurling accusations, insults and engaging in disorderly conduct? While the Mequon-Thiensville Board of Education meetings have not gotten as bad as some of those seen around the country, they are not all sunshine and roses.

One has to wonder who is behind the political savvy effort to recall four of MTSD's School Board members. The influence of outside political groups can be seen in how the recall effort's claims continue to shift, in a way that seems to follow guidance from groups like the Manhattan Institute. Their complaints began with discontent over COVID mitigations, then when the pandemic waned, shifted to school board governance issues and now have moved to inflated concerns over critical race theory, the recent inflammatory topic. Recalling four MTSD School Board members seems far from a grassroots effort of parents concerned about their children's education. If those involved in the recall effort are strictly doing this to improve the education of kids in MTSD, why are they popping up at candidate launch events? Why did they make the same argument at the Whitefish Bay School Board meeting?

Backed by extreme political groups like the Patriots of Oz, the recall group mirrors efforts across the country to replace school board members for political gain. Consider that when deciding who to support. Let's not politicize the oversight of our high-achieving local schools. Vote to keep the experienced, nonpartisan, reasonable board members so they can continue to work for our students and our community at large.

Amy Williamson
Thiensville

We need a new M-T School Board

To the editor:
Those supporting the MTSD School Board while the recall will cost taxpayers thousands of dollars, amounting to equates to 30 cents per resident.

They ignore how the School Board is squandering the \$57.7 million referendum and MTSD's bloated \$46.2 million annual "budget." MTSD's ever-expanding budget is now more than double that of the city of Mequon. Where is this money going? How about the salaries and benefits of 21 administrators hired, all of which are being paid six-figure salaries and benefits, with many over \$175,000 and a superintendent being paid over \$228,000?

Un-elected officials and the teachers union run MTSD. Whatever they request, the board approves. Residents elected the board to represent the best interests of parents and students. Instead, they rubber-stamp whatever these bureaucrats ask for.

Whose idea was it to spend \$114,000 on outside consultants and vendors, of which one CRT consultant, Blaguesmith Consulting Services LLC, alone received \$42,000 for their systematic race and privilege videos that MTSD marketed and distributed to parents, teachers, staff and administrators?

CRT, Marxist propaganda, claims whites are oppressors and blacks are oppressed. It teaches whites are both born privileged and racist. People are grouped by race and stereotyped traits are given to each according to skin color. How does this affect the child of a mixed race marriage?

Ask Matt Joynt's office for the link to Blaguesmith's "The Talk." See for yourself. It made me sick. What does this have to do with science, reading or math? This is where our tax dollars are going.

Watch the MTSD Jan. 4 School Board meeting. The first three quarters were dedicated to praising each other and ways to game the system to increase the tax levy. The last 15 minutes was spent promoting the CRT book "White Fragility." Student education was never mentioned.

The recall is necessary. This board is harming our children.

Dennis Becker
Mequon

Why is the recall happening?

To the editor:
When this bizarre school board recall effort started early this summer, my first reaction was "why?" What could justify removing officials duly elected to a nonpartisan, volunteer office, in a district that provided an excellent education to our two children, and is consistently ranked near the top in all academic ratings?

After speaking with one of the recall organizers at the Mequon pool and reading the cherry-picked (and misleading) claims on the group's fliers and website, I concluded that the primary reason was "declining academic performance."

I then pondered the following "reason" as stated on the recall petition: "Abdicating official duties by giving away board member rights to an unelected official."

What rights were given away? Who is the unelected official? What does this have to do with declining academic performance?

It made no sense until I read the front-page article in the September 7 issue of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel where I finally discovered the motivation for this ridiculous waste of taxpayer dollars.

Amber Schroeder, director of recall organizer: "There's a misconception out there that this is part of some national right-wing agenda. We're the ones pushing back on our own here against an extreme liberal agenda by the teachers union."

Scarlett Johnson, recall organizer and candidate, upon researching strategies for challenging school boards: "I think it would be best made into a more race-conscious, race-focused society."

So, now we finally have the truth. It has nothing to do with test scores or abdicating duties. It is an agenda to politicize what has traditionally been a nonpartisan, volunteer board of our local citizens.

I ask everyone in the M-T community, regardless of your political beliefs, to vote on Nov. 3 for incumbents Francour, Hollander, Kahn, and Schultz.

Jim Doornek
Mequon

Thanks to those who attended poet laureate presentation

To the editor:
Thank you to the nearly 200 community members who attended Makin' Cake with our current Wisconsin poet laureate, Dasha Kelly Hamilton, on Oct. 9. Dasha crafted an event that filled the theater with learning, discussion, laughter, and applause! Props to Dasha for creating and delivering a meaningful message of hope and healing.

One audience member commented, "This was a captivating mixture of history, natural science and personal stories mixed with humor. Along the way, Dasha folded in reality with contemporary events about race, class, equity, women's roles, home economics and more. I learned quite a bit as I listened, watched, and pondered."

Margaret Rozga, the 2019-2020 Wisconsin poet laureate, thanked the League of Women Voters for recognizing the role that the arts play in political activism.

The community conversation will continue at our workshop, "Family, Friends and Politics: How to talk with loved ones when you don't always agree" on Monday, Nov. 8, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Cedarburg Cultural Center. Registration details are at www.lwvzaukee.org.

Christy L. Schwab
Cedarburg

Deadline for recall letters is Oct. 26

The deadline for letters pertaining to the Mequon-Thiensville School District recall election must be submitted to letters@conley.net by noon Tuesday, Oct. 26.

Letters should be signed and include phone number and address so that we may verify authenticity. Neither phone number nor address will be printed.

Please keep letters to no more than 300 words. Letter writers are limited to one letter every 30 days. We reserve the right to edit letters.

Email: letters@conley.net