

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't let schools become political battlefield

To the editor:

Dear Restore MTSD:

You cannot pull my "distracting" IEP kid out of class to encourage other children's excellence. They learn patience and acceptance by being with him. They hear his unique perspective. That is part of excellence. He is part of their lesson.

You cannot ban books that mention sex from the high school curriculum. They'll learn that sex equals shame. (Plus, they'll want to read it even more if it's banned.)

You cannot decide to only teach the good about our country. They'll repeat the mistakes we have already made if they can't learn from them.

You cannot recall a candidate every time you don't like them. That teaches them to devalue democracy.

You cannot make our schools into a political battlefield. We will not let you. They are watching us. We are teaching them to stand up.

Amanda Sherman
Mequon

Recall much ado about nothing

To the editor:

As a longtime resident of Thiensville, I want to state my position on the recall election of four School Board members this Nov. 2. I think the election is disruptive, divisive and much ado about nothing. Let me explain.

The much ado part comes from my belief the Mequon-Thiensville School District and board have handled the COVID crisis intelligently.

We can be proud of their efforts to keep our children and families safe. Period. School standards and rankings? This district has consistently been a top-tier school system. From the classroom teachers all the way to the top administrators, the word that describes our educators: excellence.

There are many ways to work to improve our school system. Or, we can work to tear it down. Recalling duly elected school board members should be reserved for very special circumstances.

It's really all about the education of our children. Not politics. I say, vote for our current School Board members: Hollander, Khan, Schultz and Francour. If they don't work out, then hold them accountable at the next regular election cycle.

Susan Sonneborn
Thiensville

Attacks against school district devastating

To the editor:

I have been an educator at Homestead for 33 years and it has been devastating to see individuals leading the recall effort attacking the school district from every angle possible. It hurts so much, because my colleagues and I have dedicated ourselves to improving the lives of our students and teaching truth. We feel denigrated every time we see their negative ads.

The silver lining to this is that a large part of the Mequon-Thiensville community understands what is happening and has been incredibly supportive of our administration and staff as we navigate these difficult times. I cannot begin to express my appreciation for all you are doing.

Ernie Millard
Mequon

Voting in small local races is critical to the well-being of our schools

To the editor:

It is no wonder that so many neglect to vote anytime other than big-ticket elections. Information on the small-race candidates, the office they are running for and what decisions that office makes are often fuzzy to many of us. Candidates for these positions normally don't have the funding or campaign support to do much more than lawn signs, which adds to apathy over getting out to vote. Please keep in mind, the reality is that local races have a huge impact on how our community resolves (or doesn't) everyday problems like potholes, development or allocation of taxes. Voting for an individual who can effectively serve, determine solutions and carry out policy that will reduce that problem in the future is critical to the success of any town, big or small.

Next week we decide: Is the Mequon-Thiensville School Board making policy that

serves the success and safety of the entire student body? What are the qualifications of those who might replace them? So many issues are decided locally that have real-life and long-term consequences.

The consequences of this election could drastically and immediately change the makeup of our district, from administration through the teaching staff.

I hope voters will read up on the issues of their local elections, fact-check and vote early, by mail or in-person on Nov. 2. So much depends on it.

Please keep our excellent district intact by re-electing Hollander, Khan, Schultz and Francour.

Melissa Markgraf
Mequon

Drop-off in student performance leads to supporting MTSD recall

To the editor:

Homestead High School was ranked #1 in Wisconsin by U.S. News and World for 2014-15. Last year they were ranked #142. MTSD claims a reporting error, but an explanation of what was missed and who was responsible has not been forthcoming.

According to the 2018/19 Wisconsin school district report cards, issued by the Department of Public Instruction, the MTSD was ranked 47th in 8th grade mathematics and 20th in 3rd grade English language arts (ELA). In addition to the low rankings, the MTSD has seen a dramatic decline in these two categories since the 2015-16 school year: eighth-grade mathematics has fallen 11.2% while third-grade ELA has fallen 10.4%.

In an apparent effort to deflect from this, MTSD has moved to the Niche reporting system. School districts must join Niche and pay for rankings.

Niche weighs a number of categories as reported directly from schools via their Niche partner accounts. Academics weighs 60% based upon SAT/ACT scores, and survey responses from students and parents. Teachers grade 10%, culture and diversity 10%, parent/student surveys on overall experience 10%, health and safety 2.5%, resources and facilities 2.5%, clubs and activities 2.5%, and sports 2.5%.

Each of these rankings depends on survey responses from either parents, teachers and/or students. They are entirely dependent upon who is aware of the survey, who responds and how often. As such this methodology is subjective and can be easily manipulated to achieve a desired outcome.

This is not an apples-to-apples comparison. Only member schools are included who then can tout their Niche high rankings.

An MTSD School Board support group has been doing just that on social media, stating MTSD #4 in WI, #1 in Ozaukee County, and an A+ overall grade.

The Niche website has rankings of the best public high schools in America for 2021-(2022). Homestead was nowhere in the top 400, while several other Wisconsin high schools were.

I support restoremtsd.com and their candidates — Scarlett Johnson, Kris Kittel, Charles Lorenz, and Cheryle Rebholz.

Connie Keller
Mequon

Waste of time, money and energy

To the editor:

After seeing the signatures of people who signed the Mequon-Thiensville School Board recall petitions, I am once again shocked at the behavior in which those in the recall group have conducted themselves. Not only was it a one-sided campaign of falsehoods but it lacked integrity. Getting signatures from a nursing facility — check. Getting signatures from a college dorm — check. Getting signatures from people who have never had children in school district — check. Getting freshly turned 18-year-olds to sign — check. Collecting signatures at local businesses including a gun range, pharmacy, and salon — check. Getting people to see who their neighbors really are — check. Getting political dollars to run a political recall campaign in which schools should not be involved in politics — one massive check. Getting local taxpayers to have to fork over thousands of dollars for a needless election when voters will have their say in the spring of 2022 anyway — one

expensive check.

If these actions demonstrate the character of the people who facilitated the recall, what can we assume of the character of the candidates that they have put forward?

Whether you vote early in person, by mail or on Nov. 2, please vote to maintain the integrity of Board of Education by submitting your votes for the current school board members: Erik Hollander, Akram Khan, Chris Schultz and Wendy Francour.

Jen Mackinnon
Mequon

MTSD incumbents deserve to keep their jobs

To the editor:

It's OK for kids (and parents) to feel discomfort, or sadness, or confusion. There are things in our history and things that will happen in their lives that should make them feel that way. When we ask a school to remove any discomfort, we abdicate our responsibility as parents to help our children make sense of a confusing world.

At our house, we deal in discomfort and sadness already. It's hard to see my twins struggle with big concepts like life and death at 6 years old as they watch their dad fight cancer. But just like tough topics at school, it is relevant learning that will make them people with empathy, resilience, and compassion.

We also take precautions at home to keep others (our dad) healthy. We don't think this is a stomp on our civil liberties; we just love him and want to keep him safe. And we will continue to do this at school or at stores because we care about other humans, even the ones we don't know, more than the very short, very minute discomfort wearing a mask may give us.

I'm voting November 2 for the current MTSD School Board members — Hollander, Khan, Schultz, and Francour — because I appreciate that my kids and husband are safe and protected and learning in school. And I'm voting because I don't think it's the school's job to remove all discomfort from my kids' lives. Continue to challenge them, expand their views, and teach them how to deal with hard things. I'll continue to do my job at home to help them make sense of it all.

Lizzy Kizer
Mequon

MTSD deserves a nonpartisan School Board

To the editor:

The MTSD School Board recall has brought the dysfunction of Congress and the politics of Washington to our doorstep. It has turned our community into a space where you are on one side, or the other; and on that one piece of information one can claim to know everything about you. That type of partisanship reduces people and debate to all good and right, or all bad and wrong with no nuance or expectation of critical thinking. This is the problem with Congress, politics and this recall.

Mrs. Johnson speaks about getting involved in the recall after viewing "The Talk" and not understanding why this was being shared with constituents. What Mrs. Johnson said about "not understanding," and her conclusion that she needs to fight it is key. It is key to the problems in Congress, politics and this recall election.

When we don't understand something it is easy to rush to judge it as bad, and jump to fighting to keep things the same. It is hard to sit with that discomfort. It is even harder to converse with someone, when we disagree, to understand their perspective — without trying to convert them to our "side." And harder still to stay in conversation to find what needs to be done for the good of the community. This is the work of the School Board. It takes people who can engage with everyone by listening without an agenda, thinking critically about what is best for the whole community, and making hard choices. Over the past year, Hollander, Khan, Francour and Schultz have done this work and have made hard decisions. Some I agreed with and some I didn't, but all were thought out.

Mequon-Thiensville deserves a nonpartisan board. Vote Hollander, Khan, Francour, Schultz on Nov. 2.

Sara Kramer Frets
Thiensville

An honest accounting of MTSD's academic performance

To the editor:

Is MTSD's academic performance improving or declining? Four categories of Department of Public Instruction data show "decline" is the clear answer: (1) 11th grade state-mandated ACT scores (ELA/Math); (2) ACT Graduates scores (English/Math/Reading/Science) by graduation year; (3) 9th grade state-mandated ACT Aspire (ELA/Math) scores; and (4) 10th grade state-mandated ACT Aspire (ELA/Math) scores. Graphs of the data and additional information are at: <https://adobe.ly/3G1xvLJ>.

College readiness has materially declined. Since the 2015-16 school year, the percentage of "college ready" students in the ACT graduates is down by 4%, 5%, and 6% in English, Math, and Science, respectively. Of the peer districts of Whitefish Bay, Arrowhead, and Shorewood, only MTSD failed to improve in any subject. The 2019-20 readiness percentiles across all subject areas have fallen to their lowest point since the 2014-15 implementation of the mandatory ACT test.

Eleventh-grade math and ELA proficiency have declined even more. Since 2014-15, MTSD's Math proficiency rate declined 9%. Shorewood and Arrowhead had proficiency increases of 12% and 4%, respectively. Arrowhead and Shorewood are now ahead of MTSD in Math proficiency while WFB has expanded its lead. In ELA, MTSD declined 8% putting it behind Shorewood and WFB.

Ninth- and 10th-grade ACT Aspire results lag peers. MTSD is the only district with lower 9th grade Math proficiency rates in 2014-15 than 2018-19. WFB's Math proficiency increased 4%, Arrowhead's 5%, and Shorewood's 20%. While MTSD ELA proficiency increased, Arrowhead and Shorewood increased by more.

Tenth-grade 2018-19 proficiency rates declined compared to 2014-15: Math by 6% and ELA by 8%, dropping them to their lowest level. Math proficiency for WFB, Shorewood and Arrowhead rose 10%, 9% and 3%, respectively. MTSD's ELA performance was worse over the period than WFB, Shorewood and Arrowhead.

Jonathan Lane
Mequon

Nothing wrong with teaching inclusion

To the editor:

Critical Race Theory: This is a term frequently mentioned by the recall group yet is confusing and unknown to many. It is also a main point in their push for a recall. So where to go from here? Is CRT being taught in our K-12 schools as some say? The answer is NO. Being highly educated (12 years of post-secondary education), I can assure you that CRT is not being taught in our K-12 schools. CRT is mostly the purview of higher-level graduate studies, instructed by doctorally prepared professors. Therefore, our teachers don't have the background necessary to instruct on this theory.

However, what IS being brought to the forefront of our (and our amazing district's) attention is the importance of inclusion — of all human beings — and educating about the same. The importance of understanding racism and discrimination, and that it exists in our lives (I don't think any of us can deny this fact). The importance of understanding microaggressions, and the hurt it causes to our children, that can build and build (my mixed-race children have certainly been affected by this). The importance of equity, that every child in our district should be given the tools to succeed. I would imagine any family wants this for their child(ren) — success in life, a sense of belonging, and feeling of inclusion. Therefore, why don't we want to be a community of successful children, who include others no matter what?

Every night before bed, I tell my four children to be thankful for everything we have, and to BE KIND to others. That is what matters in life. We as adults need to model this behavior. It goes a long way.

Please check your facts, everyone, and vote for preservation of our current board. There is no room for politics in education.

Kathlyn Albright
Mequon