

South Bend Tribune

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Viewpoint: We have a duty to protect and defend the children who attend South Bend schools

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Published 5:00 p.m. ET May 19, 2020

The word transformative might not readily come to mind when describing our schools. However it is time to change the narrative. During the many years that I've spoken out on the other side of the podium at South Bend Community School Corp. school board meetings, it was never my intention to undermine or destroy the corporation, but to transform it.

Immediately upon taking my seat as school board trustee for District 2 I found myself having to weigh in and make decisions on issues that were there before I joined the board. One was the need for a referendum to compensate for the circuit breaker imposed by the state. My immediate position regarding the referendum was one of support, not only because of bad policy at the state level but for decisions being made at the local level.

When I hear critics of the referendum complaining about how the corporation conducted business in the past as a reason to vote no on the referendum I disagree. While I am not responsible for the decisions made by past superintendents and school boards, I am willing to accept responsibility for correcting their mistakes. The truth is, the current superintendent and school board inherited most of what they call mismanagement. Are we to deny current and future students for past decisions for which we and they had no control?

As it has been reported, the school board has begun to formulate a strategic plan. I am confident it will be a plan that will include ongoing conversations with the public, one that is designed to hold the superintendent and the board of trustees accountable, ensuring that we have a corporation providing equity in opportunity for all students. The strategic plan — still a work in progress — places diversity, equity and inclusion front and center, with a commitment that they will become more than words on paper. Above all matters this means respecting the voices of all stakeholders in making decisions that affect children's well-being.

Second, we have committed to providing exciting instruction for reading, writing, media literacy. Third, we stress the importance of not only socioemotional learning and trauma informed teaching, but also professional development training so all children will receive the same dignity and respect necessary to reach their highest potential. Fourth, we will be good financial stewards and act in ways that are both strategic and intentional as we develop supports for children, families and staff in safe environments.

Finally, we will strive to be vigilant in taking necessary steps to reduce the “disparate impact” that COVID-19 has laid bare on already structural inequities experienced by the corporation’s most vulnerable.

We have demonstrated in our recent meeting with the Common Council that we will extend, deepen and monitor community partnerships. I agree wholeheartedly with Mayor James Mueller in expressing his support for the referendum in The Tribune on May 1: “Public education is the foundation of a thriving community full of opportunities for everyone ... Right now, we have the best chance in a generation to turn our schools around. We must take it.” I would say we have the best chance in two generations, perhaps in the history of this corporation, to turn our schools around. We must take it.

We have a duty to protect and defend the children who attend the South Bend Community School Corp. We have a duty to protect public education, real public education. We need financial stability to help achieve the goals outlined in our strategic plan to transform teaching and learning in our schools. Please join me and vote yes on both referendum questions for the SBCSC.

A vote for the referendum is a vote to serve and support the children who attend the SBCSC.

Go to southbendvoteyes.com for more details and learn how you can support South Bend and South Bend schools.