

Parents need to send school district a message

BY JED SWARTZ

SPECIAL TO THE KENOSHA NEWS

While this month's elections tempered hopes of any substantial education reform I'm glad to see our local community growing increasingly engaged in school issues.

Front and center are the issues of boundary changes and teen suicide while the recent announcement of a more than 12 percent (yes that's 12 percent) increase in the Kenosha Unified School District's tax levy snuck by relatively uncontested.

While tragic, this past week's stabbing of a 12 year old has no doubt further concerned those parents refusing to accept boundary changes quietly. In the case of the Lance students, let's face it, those students moved would without question be put into schools that are somewhat rougher places. Will they survive? Of course. Will they be better for it? Probably not.

Parents who are concerned with their children's school environment, pay taxes, and very well may have chosen their address because of the neighborhood school have every right to protest this and every reason to be perturbed by the smug manner in which school board president Eric Olsen has dismissed them.

Where a few parents erred was in publicly attributing the schools' differences to either their respective faculties or socio-economic bases. The former charge was plain wrong as I recall both McKinley and Lincoln having impressive staffs while the latter implication struck out for simply containing a general but painful grain of truth in these politically correct times.

Kenosha News columnist Bill Guida recently lambasted those parents protesting Teen-Screen, the proposed mental health screening of eighth graders. While he is correct in pointing out the good intentions of the program's sponsors, he subsequently dismisses those of the parents and is sadly mistaken on almost everything else, not the least of which being that schools have any business dealing in mental health in the first place. Mr. Guida, in classic liberal elitist fashion, told parents to butt out and leave it to the experts.

Unfortunately the only people who can really explain their suicides are no longer with us and the only likely result of the screening would be more money in the pockets of both psychologists and drug companies.

Mr. Guida often makes clear the low esteem in which he holds the sense of everyday people, favoring smoking bans and mandatory helmet laws to insulate those without free will and recently claiming that folks (except him of course) are "force fed" fast food via advertising. Just listen to the experts and the "gummit" will make everything alright.



MY TURN

Jed Swartz is a small business owner in Kenosha and a former substitute teacher.

Mr. Guida isn't alone. Well-intentioned contemporary liberals/progressives, forever frustrated with Americans' passion for individualism, have always seen schools as their great opportunity for experiments in collectivism. Every time the schools take on another unnecessary responsibility like feeding children, babysitting, sorting them by race, etc. they see a microcosm of their perfect society: the government (largely made up of them) providing for every waking need. Troubling indeed.

These disagreements weren't always necessary. But like so many other cases, when you add the word "public" to anything you automatically limit its horizons. This should come as a surprise to no one aware of the track record of public housing projects, public assistance (welfare), public retirement (Social Security), public healthcare (Medicare/Medicaid), public disaster relief (FEMA), etc.. Even those that weren't immediate failures are nonetheless impending economic disasters.

I apologize for the imagery, but can anybody say they prefer using public toilets to their own? The tragedy of the commons is very real. Parents can forbid their child from playing with the third-grader next-door with the mustache and a mean streak when he drinks, but at a public school they're powerless. Parents can teach that one religion, one country, one attitude is preferable, but once they get to a public school they'll hear that everything under the sun is equal and the only ones who are lesser are those that would dare to say otherwise. Once again school choice in the form of vouchers would do much to remedy this rift, not to mention school crowding.

We hear relentlessly about high-school crowding yet I believe much of the recent additions to both Bradford and Tremper were for athletic facilities.

And somehow a 12 percent tax levy increase for Kenosha Unified School District happened, and nobody blinked. We are also told that portable classrooms are needed at \$300,000 apiece. While perhaps a godsend for maverick real estate agents long prospecting in double-wides, this should confound the average person. I've seen \$300,000 houses and I've seen portable classrooms and think an explanation is in order, though don't hold your breath.

Instead I'd consider joining the Kenosha Parents' Union at www.kenoshaparentsunion.org (all are welcome, parent or not) and sending KUSD the message that we are smarter than they (or Bill Guida) think.