

Mr. President, I respectfully request you allow me a few minutes to read the following statement. First of all, I wish nothing but good luck and success to Lara and Joanna. On a personal note, the outpouring of public and private support I received late Tuesday and Wednesday demonstrates how truly blessed I am to be able to live in an amazing community with so many wonderful people and a cherished school system. I look forward to getting to meet and know them all in the future.

Next, I would like to present you all with a brief Top 10 list of things I have learned this last week. Here goes...

Number 10- Take advice from those that tell you that you are crazy for running for the Board of Education because these are the smartest people you know!

Number 9- There is no better campaign staff than family and close friends! I will forever cherish the time spent with my daughter and son walking throughout the neighborhood and the night spent laughing with friends and family as we baked until 1:30 in the morning.

Number 8- Embrace assistance from all those who offer it. I've met some remarkable people over the last few weeks. I hope I have the opportunity to call them friends for many years to come. For the record, after speaking to Mr. Vito Palmieri a couple of times during the campaign, I have him to be caring, funny, respectful and a genuinely nice guy! I regret that I did not have the opportunity to become friends with him while we were both at St. Francis Prep many years ago.

Number 7- Differences of opinion should be respected, valued, and leveraged. One can never truly grow as an individual when surrounded by people who agree with you on every topic. Therefore, don't be afraid of those who challenge your opinions because questions lead to mutual enlightenment. Respectful dialogue can bring people together- I saw it happen several times over the last few weeks and this truly gives me hope!!!

Number 6- Do not let people who engage in innuendo in an attempt to stay relevant upset you!

Number 5- Approaching people you don't know is a skill worth teaching to your children. One of the most remarkable things I witnessed was watching a high school senior I had just met take the time to mentor my son on the art of film-making during my niece's lacrosse games. That impressive young man's parents and teachers should be extremely proud.

Number 4- No one location for a sign is more important than another—so don't obsess! But do make sure you have a few extra on hand as replacements!

Number 3- When a negative voice gets loud, remember they are vastly outnumbered by people who quietly say nice things. I told my kids that I am humbled to live in a community where 1,219 people took the time to go out and vote for their Dad. The goodness in people enables me to keep trying to make things better for my children and yours!

Number 2- Get some sleep and don't forget to eat!

Number 1- And the number one campaign tip for everyone – NEVER EVER mess with Sara Caponi’s lawn signs!

On a much more serious note, I am more than a little upset that three high ranking Board of Education-appointed officials issued what I perceived to be a mean-spirited/hurtful letter in a veiled attempt to discredit my candidacy. To make matters worse, I then went on to read in horror as grown adults attempted to bash a college kid and former North Shore district student for trying to stand up to a written assault on Mr. Palmieri and, by pointed implication, myself. What lesson did we, as a community, teach that young man? Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if our educational leader stepped in immediately to stop it and try to teach the adults how to behave? To your credit, Dr. Melnick, I know that you intervened on inappropriate posts in the past but I am ashamed that nobody (including myself) came to the rescue of this college boy.

During my campaign, I repeatedly tried to take the high road as the following types of things occurred all on the eve of the election: 1) The aforementioned attempt by three members of the district’s Legislative Action Committee to discredit my candidacy; 2) Community members spreading completely baseless rumors that I wanted to close the Sea Cliff Elementary School; and 3) The incident where Middle School PTO robo call resources were allegedly used by an unidentified person in support of an individual candidate. To be honest, I debated about whether or not to speak today because I am seriously considering running again next year and speaking today is probably not a good campaign strategy. But then I thought, what kind of message would I be sending to my children if their Dad chose self interest over trying to make things better for those who follow me down what should be a noble path. If someone does not have the courage or the fortitude to step up and say “enough is enough”, then the type of despicable behavior exhibited this week will continue indefinitely. I hope that by speaking today, the Administration, Board of Education, and community members can finally begin to engage in open and effective dialogue in an attempt to truly heal, unite and make things even better “FOR OUR CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY”.

Respectfully submitted for inclusion in the May 22, 2014 Board of Education minutes by me, Robert Mazzella.