

Good morning,

In my 17 years involved in one form or another in the North Shore School District, including a school board trustee for 9 years, I have never felt as compelled to reach out to you regarding this years election of school board trustees and the tenuous state of our school community.

North Shore Schools are governed by the Board of Education, comprised of seven members who serve three year terms and are elected on a staggered term basis. Trustees serve as individuals, elected to serve the community at large, not any one particular group, entity or party. Last year for the first time in district history, that changed.

The North Shore School District Reform Group was formed from the seeds of anger over their disagreement and resentment over the district potentially eliminating the Italian language program as part of the curriculum. This anger manifested itself in threats to the superintendent and school board that they, the NSSDRG, would vote down the entire school budget if they were not listened to and elect school board members who would follow what the group wants. Despite the Italian language continuing to be part of the curriculum at North Shore and succeeding in getting" their two people ", Maryanne Russo and Michael Nightingale (a partner in Vito Palmieri's law firm) elected to the Bd. of Ed., the NSSDRG continues on it's mission to control the school board by trustee majority and determine change that is unknown or undetermined and could ultimately serve the personal desires of the NSSDRG. Have you ever attended a " open " meeting of this group ? Do you know when and where they meet? Do you know who it's members are and what their agenda is ? Do they have the interests of the community at large before their own personal priorities? Will their " people " be open to the serve the entire school community over their own allegiance to the NSSDRG ?

Recently, Vito Palmieri, the president of the NSSDRG, wrote in a letter of support for Robert Mazzella, this year's reform group candidate for school board, " He will help keep the wheels of progress and change in motion ". It is not my intention to argue the merits of change or to disparage the characters of either Mr. Palmieri or Mr. Mazzella, so I won't. I would like to present you with a few facts though and ask you to come to your own conclusions on whether or not the type of change that is upon us with the NSSDRG is what you desire or have come to expect as a resident of the North Shore School District community.

In Mr. Palmieri's extensive letter to the editor to the Gold Coast Gazette, he speaks about changes the NSSDRG supported trustee's are responsible for implementing this past year. While mostly cosmetic in nature, one claimed change I found particularly self serving and grossly inaccurate is " BOE votes are no longer unanimous." The fact is, there were well over one hundred votes held in public meetings this year and there have been four votes in which trustees have cast dissenting votes. Two of those votes included Ms. Russo and Mr.Nightingale.Of the three most important votes this year-budget, bond and the district testing resolution-the vote was unanimously in favor.

Mr. Palmieri's letter concerns itself with the Board of Education and not ONCE, not ONCE does the letter use the word EDUCATION, except when using it in the title Board of Education. Mr. Palmieri says " The primary role of the Board of Education is fiscal oversight of the District." He got it half right. The primary role of the Board of Education is to set EDUCATIONAL policy and ensure fiscal responsibility.

As for fiscal oversight, the two NSSDRG supported trustees expressed dissatisfaction with the budget process. As if to prove their point, they barely gave voice to the budget process. And while Mr. Nightingale clearly recognized his role when he referred to the budget recommendations of the superintendent when he stated, " We certainly have the right to challenge those [recommendations] or make our own", he essentially took a pass on the opportunity for open discussion and transparency. The minutes of the five board meetings dedicated to the budget discussions reflect only the slightest participation of Mr. Nightingale with Ms. Russo being not far behind. Please see public record. The budget vote; 7-0. Unanimous.

Perhaps most disturbing and also on public record is this. Mr. Palmieri has experience in helping people get elected to public office. He headed the committee to elect Dan Halloran , an associate lawyer at Mr. Palmieri's law firm at the time, to the New York City Council. Mr. Halloran was arrested last year on bribery and extortion charges and is awaiting trial. The complaint states that Mr. Halloran arranged for meetings and negotiated amounts for bribes in order to obtain certification for a certain politician to get on the NYC mayoral ballot. In order to get on the ballot, this certain politician needed a certain amount of influential signatures, one of those being Vincent Tabone who apparently wanted upwards of \$50,000 for his services. I leave the particular political parties out because that's not where I'm going. Please Google Mr. Halloran and get the full story if you wish. I'll leave it like this from the NY Times ; " 'That's politics, ' Mr. Halloran said in one meeting, Where ' money greases the wheels.' " And Mr. Palmieri, lawyer for Mr. Tabone , had this to say about the kind of politics where " money greases the wheels" and about law enforcement officials who brought charges against Halloran and Tabone, " It seems to be that they are trying to make the business of politics as usual into a crime ".

There are ONLY two candidates running for school board who are truly independent and who are not beholden to any group or organization.They are women of character and integrity and will make decisions knowledgeably, ethically and respectfully and will speak them in their own voice, not on someone else's terms or behalf. BOTH candidates fully understand that the role of a school board trustee is to serve the greater school community. Joanna Commander and Lara Gonzalez are the ONLY two candidates who possess the depth of knowledge and experience from BOTH the educational and fiscal sides of school involvement to immediately affect positive change for all the community.

Today you can make your decision on whether or not you are willing to accept the " business of politics " in the North Shore schools. Tomorrow your VOTE will affirm what your decision is.

TUESDAY, MAY 20TH at the NORTH SHORE HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM,
FROM 7AM TO 10PM.

Please share this e-mail if you care to. Whatever your decision is, please decide to vote.

Respectfully,

Tom Murphy