

Good evening,

I am hoping you will reconsider delaying the formation of a Community-School Engagement Committee. With the annual meeting scheduled for April, it was my hope that a school advocacy team could be in place well before. We need to learn something from three failed budget votes.

I surely understand the desire — and the need — not to create committees without clear purpose and direction and that duplicate efforts already underway. Jean Wheeler made a compelling case that Oxbow already has an organization of school and community members that successfully fosters community support. And surely, not burdening principals with added responsibilities and time-consuming commitments is devoutly to be wished. I recognize that their primary responsibility is to their students and staff.

However, a school has to have community support from more than those directly involved in its day-to-day operations. FoNES is an organization of parents who have children enrolled in Newbury Elementary. It very effectively advocates for programming that enhances the experience of students and staff alike. I was a member of FoNES for several years after I retired, and the organization does this with commitment and focus. I believe, though, that I was and have been the only member of FoNES who did not have a child in the school. And I have not participated in FoNES over the last few years because I felt its primary role was clearly for the parents of current students. I did coordinate with FoNES each year to help organize the FarmRaiser Harvest Celebration, an event that served both to reinforce NES's farm-to-school initiative and that invited the entire community to a festival celebrating local food producers.

If FoNES actively takes on the task of promoting NES to the wider community, its mission would have to undergo a fundamental expansion. If I were a parent with a child in the school, I would feel strongly that it would dilute FoNES' mission substantively.

I believe the widespread community support that Newbury Elementary has had for the 47 years it operated as an elementary school with its own independent school board is worth cultivating. There are numerous reasons, not the least being the passage of annual budgets. Voters need to feel satisfaction and pride in NES. They need to feel that it is a vital community resource enriching the entire community; that there is a continuity in the excellent education offered even though the school's local control has ended; that the school's educational program and culture are viewed as elements in attracting new families to the town; that it is helping to increase property values.

Members of the Newbury community felt bruised by the forced merger. It is now time for healing and embracing the future as part of OUUSD. After the Board agreed to an NES School-Community Engagement Committee, even going so far as soliciting volunteers for it and appointing community members, having the Board now drag its heels and possibly renege on its previous decision cannot help the healing. I believe strongly that the Board would be better served by moving ahead expeditiously with its initial decision to establish a local School-Community Engagement Committee that facilitates communication among all Newbury

residents and that celebrates the school and its students and staff. Would it be a distraction, as some at last night's meeting implied? Yes, it will demand some time on the principal's part. But is it possible that the principal might welcome help in engaging the community and not view the committee's work as frivolous or time-consuming or out-of-control? Might it be seen as having an important role that will help counter the sense that school governance has become a distant bureaucracy? If I were the principal, I'd look forward to help in engaging the community and not see the committee as just another burdensome obligation.

Emmy