



Schools as the Cornerstone of Hope

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As the Attleboro High School Class of 2000 and student government president, I had a unique perspective on the governance of the school system, but it was the academic experiences the Attleboro schools provided that allowed me to further my education at Fordham University and Boston College Law School. At those Jesuit institutions the concepts of public service and social justice were paramount, and it was in keeping with those ideals that I launched my campaign to serve as an at-large representative to the Attleboro School Committee.

Last spring I embarked on a listening tour with school administrators, current and former School Committee members, teachers, parents, and a few students. What I heard was a yearning for professionalism and leadership. At the heart of leadership sits vision, and vision requires information. To collect information, I convened weekly roundtables on issues related to the Attleboro schools. The "topics" we covered are recounted on my campaign website, along with a "consensus statement" each group generated. These did not give me any magic formulas. However, they have left me better positioned to ask good questions, starting with this: How do we keep our schools moving forward?

First, we maximize student achievement. We should not think of ourselves as a community of 6,000 students, but rather 6,000 top priorities. Education policy is where economic policy intersects with moral responsibility to cultivate students whose lives are defined by opportunity and choice.

Second, we must reaffirm the role the Attleboro schools play in our community. When you drive into Attleboro you should be greeted with the following sign - "Welcome to Attleboro: Where the Schools are the Cornerstone of Our Community." We must push back against the perception that this is not an ideal place to raise a family, precisely so that this can become a more ideal place to raise a family.

Third, we must seek consensus when possible, and disagree respectfully when it is not. The roundtable consensus statements exemplify the plausibility of consensus. They represent the thoughts, opinions, and above all the hopes of the participants. At each roundtable I watched members of this community vent, suggest, and advocate. Underlying each word was the unmistakable aura of hope. Hope for the role of education in the lives of their children, and themselves. Hope for the role of education in the community, and the role of the community in education. I gathered some ideas, and I developed some priorities. Most of all I walked away with a simple hope: a hope that Attleboro's schools and the board that governs them are on the cusp of better days.

This type of statement is easy to dismiss - especially when it comes from a first-time political candidate - because it is so easy to dream big. But dreaming big leads to vision, and again, with vision comes leadership. There is a well-justified fatigue felt with all aspects of government right now, and the School Committee and school administration are hardly immune. But difficult moments are ripe for progress. It is time to overcome our exhaustion. It is time to put aside the petty squabbles that have consumed the Attleboro schools over the past few years. It is time to recognize that education is the sole variable that can lift individuals and communities alike to realities previously unknown. It is time to make a collective determination that we are a city of 6,000 top priorities, and we simply will not rest until their lives are defined by opportunity and choice.

DAVID MURPHY is a candidate for an at-large seat on the Attleboro School Committee.