

BRIT SATCHWELL'S AAEA BOE COMMENTS 1/6/10

I APPRECIATE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SAY A FEW WORDS BECAUSE OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT IS ABOUT TO HOST WHAT COULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT MEETINGS IN THE HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, FOUR PUBLIC FORUMS TO DISCUSS OUR BUDGET FOR THE REMAINDER OF THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, AND POSSIBLY BEYOND. I SAY "POSSIBLY BEYOND" BECAUSE ANY ATTEMPTS TO GAUGE WHAT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS WILL BE FORTHCOMING BEYOND NEXT YEAR IS A FORTUNE TELLER'S BET AT BEST. BUT PROJECT AND BUDGET IS WHAT WE MUST DO TO ALLOCATE OUR DWINDLING RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY, EVEN IF THOSE PROJECTIONS ARE MADE IN THE WAKE OF FINANCIAL GYRATIONS AT THE STATE LEVEL.

I WANT TO GO BEYOND HOPING THAT THE PUBLIC WILL ATTEND THESE FORUMS; I WANT TO BEG. OVER THE PAST DECADE ALL MICHIGAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE COPEd AS BEST THEY COULD UNDER THE WEIGHT OF A STRUCTURAL DEFICIT IMPOSED BY THE WAY WE INADEQUATELY FUND EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN MICHIGAN. "COPING" IS MY GENTLE WAY OF SAYING THAT WE'VE CUT OUR EXPENSES, YEAR IN AND YEAR OUT, AS HAS EVERY DISTRICT IN MICHIGAN. HERE IN ANN ARBOR WE'VE COPEd ADMIRABLY, CUTTING BEHIND THE SCENES IN A MYRIAD OF WAYS IN ORDER TO KEEP THE CUTS AWAY FROM CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND FROM BEING NOTICED AT THE KITCHEN TABLE. I ATTRIBUTE OUR ABILITY TO HAVE THOSE CUTS GO LARGELY UNNOTICED TO 1) GOOD PLANNING AND FORESIGHT BY ADMINISTRATION AND THIS BOARD, AND 2) TO THE TEACHERS WHO TOOK UPON THEMSELVES THE TASK OF DOING MORE WITH LESS, ONE SMALL ADDITIONAL BURDEN AT A TIME WITHIN A SYSTEM CONSTRICTING IN UPON ITSELF.

WITH THE FAILURE OF THE MILLAGE IN NOVEMBER, WE ARE NOW FACED WITH THE CUMULATIVE EFFECTS OF THOSE CUTS AS THEY BECOME COMPOUNDED BY CUTS OF A MAGNITUDE NEVER BEFORE IMAGINED BY THIS DISTRICT. 78% OF THE VOTERS IN THIS COUNTY DID NOT EVEN VOTE... ALTHOUGH THE MILLAGE FAILED, THE ONLY MANDATE THAT CAME OUT OF THE MILLAGE VOTE WAS RELATIVE APATHY. I HAVE SOME SYMPATHY FOR THOSE WHO STAYED HOME: THEY MAY HAVE ASSUMED THAT THE ISSUE OF FUNDING WAS JUST THE USUSAL CIVIC BACKGROUND NOISE THAT IS TO BE EXPECTED IN TOUGH TIMES, THAT

THE SCHOOLS WOULD ALWAYS ENDURE, THAT THE BUSES WOULD ALWAYS RUN AS USUAL, THAT ANN ARBOR'S EXTENSIVE MENU OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES WOULD SOMEHOW SURVIVE, THAT CLASS SIZES WOULD NOT INCREASE OR THAT OUR STAFF WOULD NOT BE CUT... IN SHORT THAT WE'D CONTINUE TO COPE WITH NO MAJOR DISRUPTIONS TO THE CLASSROOMS. I'M HERE TO SAY THAT AS OF LAST NOVEMBER, NONE OF THOSE ASSUMPTIONS ARE NOW SAFE. ANN ARBOR SCHOOLS WILL – MUST! - LOOK DIFFERENT IN THE FUTURE.

THIS IS WHY I'M REDUCED TO BEGGING THAT THE PUBLIC ATTEND THE BUDGET FORUMS OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. THIS BOARD, OUR ADMINISTRATORS, AND THE TEACHER UNION WHICH I REPRESENT HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HOW TO WEATHER THE NEXT FEW YEARS WITHOUT IMPACTING OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION ANY MORE THAN IS NECESSARY, BUT ULTIMATELY THE PUBLIC MUST DETERMINE WHAT ANN ARBOR'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS WILL BE. AND IN THAT QUESTION, FORCED BY OUR FUNDING DILEMMA, LIES OUR OPORTUNITY... THE CHANCE TO MAKE CHANGES THAT NOT ONLY CONSERVE OUR LIMITED RESOURCES, BUT THAT ALSO CHANGES THE WAY THAT WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN FOR THE BETTER. NEITHER THIS BOARD, OUR CAPABLE ADMINISTRATORS, NOR OUR EXTRAORDINARY STAFF CAN DO THIS WITHOUT THE PUBLIC'S INFORMED GUIDANCE.

INFORMED GUIDANCE. I RECOGNIZE THAT DIGGING INTO HOW THE DISTRICT IS FUNDED, ITS MANDATED OBLIGATIONS, ITS ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES, AND ITS INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IS A HUGE AND SOMETIMES MIND-NUMBING TASK. IT WOULD BE MUCH EASIER TO JUST LET THE "EXPERTS" RUN THE SHOW AS THEY HAVE TO A GREAT DEGREE IN THE PAST. BUT THE DAYS OF SMALLER INCREMENTAL COMPROMISES ARE PAST; WE NOW NEED THE PUBLIC TO CLIMB THE LEARNING CURVE AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE. I WANT THE PUBLIC TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND THAT THIS BOARD NEEDS YOU, YOUR ADMINISTRATORS NEED YOU, AND YOUR TEACHERS NEED YOU TO HELP TRANSLATE THIS FUNDING SINKHOLE INTO MORE THAN LARGE CUTS, ALTHOUGH MAJOR CUTS MUST AND WILL BE MADE. WE NEED YOU TO TELL US WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN, TO MAKE YOUR PRIORITIES KNOWN AND TO WEIGH THEM AGAINST WHAT IS NOW POSSIBLE, TO ADVISE US AS TO WHAT NEW DIRECTIONS WE MIGHT TAKE.

THERE IS A CYNICAL PERCEPTION AMONG SOME THAT THE UNION WILL DO NOTHING MORE THAN DIG IN TO PRESERVE THE STAUUS QUO, RESIST CHANGE. I'M HERE TO SAY ONCE AGAIN THAT THE REASON THAT THE CUTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE OVER THE PAST DECADE HAVE GONE LARGELY UNNOTICED IS DUE LARGELY TO THE EFFORTS OF TEACHERS WHO DESERVE A BETTER OPINION FROM THOSE CYNICS. I AM ON RECORD AS SAYING THAT THIS IS PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ANYTHING THE PUBLIC WANTS TO DISCUSS IS ON THE TABLE. BUT THAT TABLE MUST BE THE BARGAINING TABLE.

TO THOSE WHO THINK THAT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IS NOTHING MORE THAN TWO SIDES FIGHTING TO GET AS MUCH AS THEY CAN OUT OF EACH OTHER, LET ME START YOUR ASCENT UP THE LEARNING CURVE: BARGAINING IS WHEN YOU GET THE SMARTEST AND MOST CREATIVE PEOPLE FROM BOTH SIDES TO SIT DOWN AND PROBLEM SOVLE TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL, THE BEST POSSIBLE EDUCATION FOR ANN ARBOR'S CHILDREN. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE AND ADMINISTRATION ENGAGE IN CONSTANT YEAR-ROUND BARGAINING, AND WE CALL IT PROBLEM SOLVING. ANN ARBOR'S HISTORY OF BARGAINING HAS ESTABLISHED AND MAINTAINED ONE OF THE STELLAR DISTRICTS IN THIS STATE FOR DECADES. BARGAINING, WHEN DONE COOPERATIVELY AND INTELLIGENTLY, WORKS. AND THE RESULT IS NOT THE TEACHERS' CONTRACT, NOT ADMINISTRATION'S CONTRACT, BUT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S CONTRACT... THE PUBLIC'S CONTRACT THAT ENSURES THE BEST FOR OUR CHILDREN.

ONE FINAL WORD... I HOPE THAT TEACHERS WILL ALSO TRY TO FIND THE TIME AWAY FROM WHAT I CALL "THE SECOND SHIFT" TO ATTEND A FORUM AS WELL. THERE WILL BE LOTS OF IDEAS SHARED, LOTS OF THEORIES ABOUT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES. IN THOSE IDEAS AND POLICIES WILL BE TEACHABLE MOMENTS WHERE ONLY A TEACHER CAN DESCRIBE HOW THAT IDEA OR POLICY MIGHT ACTUALLY BE IMPLEMENTED IN A CLASSROOM. JUST AS WE NEED THE PUBLIC TO TURN OUT IN PARTNERTSHIP WITH THE DISTRICT, SO TOO SHOULD WE TURN OUT TO LEND THE PERSPECTIVE THAT ONLY A TEACHER CAN PROVIDE. I HOPE MY COLLEAGUES CAN FIND THE TIME AND ENERGY TO CHIP IN AT THESE IMPORTANT MEETINGS.

WITH ALL OF THAT SAID, I THANK YOU AND I LOOK FORWARD TO DEVELOPING SOME OF THE NEW IDEAS AND INITIATIVES, SUCH AS ALTERNAIVE COMPENSATION MODELS AND MORE OBJECTIVE TEACHER EVALUATIONS, THAT THE UNION IS CURRENTLY PURSUING WITH

ADMINISTRATION. I THINK THE PUBLIC WILL BE PLEASED TO LEARN ABOUT THESE NEW INITIATIVES AT THE FORUMS AS QUESTIONS COME UP.