**Leopold PFO Meeting 2/14/2017**

This year the school board has two Seats open for election: Seat 6 and Seat 7. Each seat has three candidates running for the seat. The Leopold PFO hosted a School Board Candidate Forum at the February meeting in order to learn more about the candidates. Five of the six candidates were present. Ali Muldrow was unable to attend because of a family emergency.

**School Board Candidate Forum**

Moderator - Abby Becker

Candidates:

Seat 6

Kate Toews

Cris Carusi

Ali Muldrow

Seat 7

Ed Hughes (Incumbent)

Nicki Vander Meulen

Matt Andrzejewski

Each candidate introduced him- or herself and why they felt led to run for the school board. Three questions were posed to the candidates. Each candidate had a chance to answer each question. Following the prepared questions, audience members were invited to ask questions. The candidates were then given the opportunity to pose questions to the audience.

Candidate profiles are available at this link (<https://www.lwvdanecounty.org/candidates-answers-spring-primary-2017>)

1. **Please share your thoughts on what the district has done well or where they could do better to improve efforts in addressing the achievement gap, particularly at the elementary level?**
   * Kate Toews: school district is doing some things well such as equity budgeting which means money is distributed to schools according to need. Biggest issue is that we need to do a better job of hiring and retaining teachers of color. The school district is not competitive enough with compensation for teachers/staff.
   * Cris Carusi: school district has made some improvements in the past few years such as reduced class sizes, especially in K-5 grades. What is needed is more support for kids who need academic and social support.
   * Matt Andrzejewski: Talked about problems with DLI rollout at Cherokee. Ways the school board can improve: Need to invest in the teachers; Better address behavior problems in the classroom. Would like the district to hire behavior analysts to help support teachers.
   * Ed Hughes: He states he believes this is the critical issue in the school district. Reiterated that the achievement gap is a difference in performance between students of different races, and that’s where the focus should be. We need schools to have a consistent and cohesive curriculum. Doesn't feel that class size is a current problem. Madison class sizes are smaller than the state averages. Curriculum changes are the key.
   * Nicki Vander Meulen: Creating community and providing resources at the school level to families is important. Community school model is important. Too many suspensions and expulsions in the schools. Teachers and staff are underpaid for the difficult job that they have. Improving compensation will improve retention and satisfaction. DLI program is a great program as well.
2. **Over half of our students in the Dual Language Immersion program. Implementation and growth of DLI has, at times, created tension within the schools among staff and parents. How do we support the concerns of staff and families while best supporting our English Language Learners? How do we recruit and retain enough high quality bilingual teachers and staff for a successful program while retaining our ELI teachers and their institutional knowledge?**
3. Nicki Vander Meulen: Need local programs that train bilingual teachers and staff. Make the DLI process more transparent, e.g. how the lottery system works. More parent involvement and communication is needed.
4. Ed Hughes: Challenges come because when the program is started it grows year by year. Creates teachers/staff anxiety about changes in staffing needs. There is also a perception that kids not in DLI have more behavior challenges - this also concerns teachers. He looked in this data recently, but didn't find that ELI kids in a DLI/ELI school perform worse than kids in ELI-only schools. Meaning that being an ELI student in a “DLI” school is not a disadvantage to being ELI anywhere else. Feels that DLI has been very successful in general.
5. Matt Andrzejewski: Bilingual education is a long-term commitment. Benefits are not seen for 6-8 years. The school district did not adequately plan for teaching staff as the program grew. He will make sure board addresses issues of this nature and make sure long term plans are made. School district needs long-term planning when starting these initiatives.
6. Cris Carusi: There are benefits to keeping kids immersed in their native culture. There is concern DLI programs split school community in half. There are ways to address this. Need to make sure kids not in DLI are getting the support that they need. Many non-DLI classrooms have more students with behavior and social issues. There is also a shortage of bilingual teachers. Bilingual teachers often go to other districts that pay higher salaries.
7. Kate Toews: WI does not accept teaching license reciprocity from other states. Getting re-licensed costs money, teachers coming to WI would be coming to an ACT 10 state with lower salaries. It is tough to recruit. The school district is starting a Hmong DLI program - it has been very hard to get educators from other states where they are plentiful. Improved teacher compensation would help with recruitment.
8. **Advanced Learning (AL) is one of the three major service programs provided in our district along with services for English Language Learners and services for students with disabilities. Our district just made a significant investment in evaluating our Advanced Learning program in preparation to update the plan next fall. How can the board help ensure that recommendations in the new plan provide consistent opportunities across all MMSD schools? And how can the plan help ensure that under-represented students are better identified so that AL services can support students both with potential and those currently achieving?**

Kate Toews: Challenges in identifying students appropriately. District is focusing on what students "can do" versus what they "could do" (ability vs potential). Interventions for the advanced learners need to be improved. District is failing in this area. Communication with parents is also a big problem and needs to be improved.

1. Cris Carusi: Currently MAP test scores are the main means of identification. These have biases. Teacher and parent identification can also have implicit bias. Even when honors classes are open to all at the high school level, most kids enrolled are Caucasian. Need to improve diversity.
2. Matt Andrzejewski: Need to identify kids who are high achieving in areas more than just math and English such as the arts. Gender inequity is present as well. Need to use resources in the community such as at the University to support Advanced Learning curriculum.
3. Ed Hughes: There have been many improvements in AL and there has been more focus on advanced learning within the school district. School based norms can be used for identification. Are there students achieving higher than the norm for that particular school.
4. Nicki Vander Meulen: Students can be gifted in one area and not another. Students can also have a disability but also be gifted. Test scores should not be used to identify AL students. Additionally, need more transparency of the program. More input from students as well as parents for how they want the program to work.