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Full text of letter submitted to the *Grayslake Times*.

Referendum idea proves “Friends of District 46” are anything but.

Let me preface this piece by assuring you that I’m no fan of Dr. William Spady, the sociologist-turned-alter-native-education-guru who enjoyed a brief but explosive tenure as a “strategic planning consultant” with Community Consolidated School District 46 during the last school year. After sitting through one of Dr. Spady’s goofy “strategic planning” presentations, with all its squishy P.C. philosophy and New Age vagaries (“Spheres of living?” Spare me!), I was as relieved as anyone when the public rose up to squelch his role with the District.

But the whole Spady fiasco pales in comparison to the new “grass roots movement” it has spawned, the one whose slick mailer recently found its way into Grayslake mailboxes. This movement comes complete with a catchy name (“Friends of District 46”) and a cause: a turnkey elementary school curriculum package called “Core Knowledge,” which they wish to implement in District 46 schools via the ever-popular public referendum.

I don’t know about the rest of District 46 parents and residents, but I have some real problems with this group.

The issue isn’t “Core Knowledge,” which I admit to knowing little about beyond the glowing but probably-not-entirely-objective sales pitch from our so-called “Friends.” In point of fact, even if the curriculum package was everything they want us to believe it is, it wouldn’t change the reality that the idea this group is pushing - placing this or any other curriculum program up for referendum - is inappropriate, undemocratic, and just plain dumb.

It’s inappropriate because it intrudes upon the judgement and decision-making responsibilities of professionals who, in fact, already report to the public - the superintendent and curriculum director, both of whom are appointed by the School Board.

Likewise, it’s undemocratic because it seeks to usurp the authority of a fairly elected government body, that being the School Board.

And yes, it’s dumb - really dumb - because of what it asks the public to do. The proposed referendum wants us to take a critical decision about public education out of the hands of education professionals and place it instead with a small group who, no matter how well-meaning or strongly motivated, are simply not qualified to make the decision. It’s like having a lawyer tell your surgeon what open-heart procedure to use. Or appointing a citizens’ task force to come up with a plan for Mr. Rumsfeld to execute in Afghanistan. Dumb, dumb, dumb.

So before my “Friends” go any further with their clearly misguided effort, I’d encourage them to consider the options that are, and always have been, open to them within the existing system.

If you don’t like the District 46 curriculum, lobby the School Board to change it.

If you don't like the superintendent and his people, petition the Board to have them removed.

And if the Board members won't do what you want them to, work to elect some new Members who will.

In the meantime, our "Friends" may want to re-read the one statement in their mailer with which I, and I think most other District 46 parents, wholeheartedly agree - the line pointing out that our District's premier strength is its teachers.

In light of that sentiment, I find it interesting that the "Friends" didn't canvas this all-important group before taking their cause to the voters. Or maybe they did, and didn't find the results as compelling as those from "a recent national evaluation by the renowned John (sic) Hopkins University," which they chose to utilize as a basis for support.

So I'd like to suggest that before we go to the time, trouble and expense of holding a public referendum, perhaps a little "in-house" referendum is in order.

Let's ask the District 46 teachers – all of them – for an up-or-down, yea-or-nay vote on the "Core Knowledge" curriculum.

And while we're at it, we might ask them how they feel about working for a district where decisions about curriculum - and presumably any other issue of equal gravity - are liable to be second-guessed and even overturned by a small, politically-motivated group of concerned citizens.

Do they really think any "great teacher" would consider such a district a good place to spend a career? Or for that matter, any more time than it takes to find another job?

I think the answer to those questions is pretty obvious. Which is why, when the Friends of District 46 come knocking on your door, petition in hand, I urge you to send them on their way without your signature. After all, with "Friends" like these, who needs enemies?

-- Mike Landers
Grayslake resident and District 46 parent

Link to the response to this letter.

<http://www.watchd46schools.org/Docs/KvetonEd-GT110901.pdf>