



An Educated Decision

By
Katherine
Custer

The Sea Isle City Public School has recently been the focus of a heated debate: "To close the school or to keep it open--?" On Tuesday, April 15, during the SIC School Board Elections, residents will be able to vote for the candidates they feel will best answer that question.



In 1880, President James Garfield said, "Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained."

Today, Garfield's words echo the beliefs of every American who appreciates the importance of a good education. This certainly includes the residents of Sea Isle City, where education is currently a popular topic of conversation. That's because Sea Isle City Board of Education elections are approaching and, with four vacancies to fill, the big question is: "Should we close the Sea Isle City Public School (SICPS) - or not?"

Obviously, it is not a simple question to answer. At the heart of this important issue are stacks of state reports, projections, and of course, an abundance of emotion. Fortunately, we have eight school board candidates who all agree that the education of our children is a very important issue.

Three of the candidates are currently members of the Sea Isle City Board of Education: **Ellen Ramsey, Matthew McCallum** and **Steven Zellers**. Zellers is the President of the board and McCallum is the Vice President.

McCallum, who is a superintendent for a construction company, is the father of three, two of whom are currently enrolled at SICPS.

"At some point in time it may be necessary to close the school...but I don't feel that this is the time," said McCallum. "I feel that my kids have received a good education here, and the only reason some people want to close the school is to save a few bucks on taxes."

As for Zellers, who is a regional sales manager for the Utz Corporation with three children in the school, he also wants to keep the school open. "I think that the students will lose out because they

now, with their small numbers, get more help than they would at a bigger school," he said.

Ramsey, a stay-at-home mom who has worked in the past as a teacher, has thrown her hat into the ring with three other candidates who hope to join her on the board. In addition to Ramsey, **Barbara Drew, Dan Tumolo** and **Valere Egnasko** make up the "Best For Sea Isle Kids" campaign, and the four all agree that it is time to close the school.

Ramsey, Drew, Tumolo and Egnasko say that they are offering voters a "clear choice" because they feel that the issues of shrinking enrollment, the school's part-time administration, small class sizes, and a lack of continuity for the students have all taken a negative toll. They also feel that a school district such as Ocean City's will offer Sea Isle's students "a more enriched academic, social, and extra-curricular environment."

Additionally, members of the "Best" campaign also assert that closing the school could save Sea Isle's taxpayers up to \$1.5 million in annual costs. However, they are quick to point out that money is a secondary issue, and that "better opportunities, greater resources and an enhanced experience for students" are among the reasons they want to make the change.

"We've read the feasibility study and the facility study," said Egnasko, "and we learned that there are over \$2 million worth of repairs needed at the school and that the enrollment is forecast to drop to 60 students. But, more importantly, the kids just aren't getting the educational opportunities and breadth of programs that they could in a larger school. Leadership requires a determination to seek out the necessary information and a willingness to make the tough decisions. Our team has

already put a lot of time into researching and understanding the issues the school faces and we are committed to resolving these issues as quickly as possible."

The other candidates hoping to be elected include **Joseph La Rosa** and **Tara Kutschera**.

Kutschera, who has three children ranging in age from two months to five years, is a Professor of Public Health at Stockton University. According to her, the school district should examine every option before closing the school.

"I think it would behoove us to

know what the public school system at the state and county level are planning before we make a decision for what's best here," said Kutschera. "I don't feel that it is time to simply throw in the towel because I believe that our school still has something to offer, if not for all grades, perhaps only as a Pre-K through 4th grade school. Then possibly we can send our middle school students to Ocean City."

La Rosa, who is a self-employed telecommunications contractor, graduated from SICPS in 1979. "I'm running because I feel that the school should not close at this time, and because I want to help the students as much as I can," he said.

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE

School Board Election

Tuesday, April 15 4-9pm

1st & 2nd Districts

Community Lodge -

300 JFK Blvd. & Park Road

3rd & 4th Districts

TI Civic Center

138 85th Street

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