

SOS Reporter

“ Save Our Schools By Supporting Our Schools “

September 20, 2005

EDUCATIONAL ISSUES NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1 Num. 7

Afterword from the Chair

by Linda Westergaard, S.O.S. Chairperson
linda@LindaWestergaard.com

The Save Our Schools (SOS) committee wishes to thank the voters of Des Moines for participating in one of the most important school board elections in recent years. We now call on all concerned about the future of our schools to join SOS and work together with us to improve the education of Des Moines students. Many voters agreed with SOS members that it is time for change, and we sincerely hope that all members of the Des Moines school board heard that message.

We are surprised and disappointed to hear one ousted incumbent complain that voters were narrow minded and focused on only one issue. She must know this is not the case because she heard the majority of other candidates address problems of low teacher morale, excessive testing, alarming expulsions and drop-out rates, and poor choices in infrastructure spending.

While we launched SOS in response to the School Board's plan to close neighborhood schools, our efforts now focus on a wider variety of issues including more responsible fiscal allocation of resources and quality education for all Des Moines students. We believe that school board members must be accountable to the community.

We look forward to working with the entire School Board to make certain that the Des Moines Public School system serves the needs of all Des Moines students.

SOS Profile

Linda Westergaard is a lifelong Des Moines resident. She is Chairperson of Save Our Schools. Linda serves as the president of the Douglas Acres Neighborhood Association, is a Board Member for Northeast Neighbors, Inc., and is active in the Greater East Side Development Corporation. She is also on the Luther Park Care Advisory Committee. She serves on the Zoning Board of Adjustment for the City of Des Moines. Linda has been married to Neal for more than 30 years and has 2 daughters.

SOS Sees SB Election As Victory

The election of two SOS friendly candidates and the very narrow loss of a third, along with the unseating of the nine-year incumbent, has sent a message loud and clear. The school board must reform its policies and procedures and revise its top down style of operation of recent years. The public is paying attention and will continue to do so. Over 70% of the votes cast by Des Moines citizens were for reform candidates. We are energized by the message of reform that the results of this election have reinforced. Now let us all roll up our sleeves and get to the long, hard task of examining what is working and what is not. Let us have the necessary courage to step forward and support the hard work of “creating quality public education for all our children” - that is the current challenge before us.

During the campaign, SOS members worked long and hard to glean as much information about the 8 candidates seeking three open seats on the DMPS Board as could be obtained. Through attending candidate forums, studying candidate platforms, and dialogue with the various individuals seeking election, we sought to support candidates that were supportive of the SOS mission. Contrary to what our detractors say about SOS, we are as far from a “one issue” group as we could possibly be. Our varied goals all share a common thread of reforming the public educational system of this district into the absolute best that it can possibly be.

While the destruction of neighborhood schools was the original impetus that spawned the birth of SOS, we have since grown to encompass goals that involve buildings, curriculum, administration, educators, support staff, and all facets of administering public education. To accomplish these lofty goals, we need your support along with the growing network of concerned citizens - parents, educators, neighbors, business men and women - alongside officials at all levels of government and public service.

Looking Backward; Looking Forward: SOS to Date

Since Memorial Day 2005, hundreds of us have worked to reform the Des Moines School District.

We called ourselves SaveOurSchools (SOS) and agreed upon our mission. We failed, however, to achieve our first goal: to convince the School Board to agree to a moratorium of its July 12 decision to close schools and build several new ones. This moratorium, recommended by political leaders, would have allowed school board members and most concerned members of the public to work intelligently and creatively together toward solutions to perceived problems. The Board responded with a resounding NO. In the months since, Board Members continue to spend money and push forward major projects without input of those involved.

Thanks to our dedicated SOS legal team we are well-prepared for achieving our second goal: legal action to stop the school closures, demolition, and construction of new buildings. We will soon announce the time, place, and location of the hearing and invite you to show support by attending.

Also, we are on target toward our third goal of involving a county-wide network of citizens. We held two public

meetings, sent thousands of communications, and prepared and distributed a series of SOS Newsletters.

Our members independently supported and promoted school board candidates who committed to reform of the DMPS system. We participated in five public forums, assisted in sponsoring forums; and watched two pro-reform candidates win and two others come close in a contested race.

Looking forward, we continue to build our data base, continue to invite educators, parents and community activists to commit time and talent and resources to SOS. We actively seek individuals and cooperation with other groups. The next step is a task force divided into research groups with workable objectives. Part of this research will be an optional questionnaire of DMPS employees (with identities protected). We are organizing for action in research and advocacy.

Reform has begun. We appreciate your support and encourage your input.

Nan Stillians
S.O.S. Coordinator

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Our Mission

To achieve the highest possible quality educational system in the Des Moines Schools by reforming current planning processes, fiscal management, and oversight conditions and also by developing local|state|national networks of support and expertise to prepare all our students for their best possible lives in an increasingly global world.

LEGAL UPDATE

by Suzette Jensen & Nelda Mickle

SOS has two active legal challenges related to the Des Moines School Board's July 12 decision. The first is an appeal to the Iowa Department of Education (DOE). The second is a "Writ of Certiorari" in Polk County District Court. Both challenges are based on the July 12 decision of the board to close schools and modify how local option sales tax monies are to be spent.

Our hearing before the DOE's administrative law judge is scheduled for October 5. To put it in simple terms we are challenging the School Board's decision based on the fact that they did not follow proper procedure as established by law. We are asking the DOE to overturn their decision.

As to the "Writ of Certiorari", we are asking the court to examine the Des Moines School Board's action in connection with its' July 12 vote to see if it acted illegally. We filed this action because there was a change in the Iowa Law in 2003 related to the "Change in Use" of the approved local option sales tax revenues. The law now says that a "Change in Use" of local option sales tax revenues from that approved by the voters must be submitted to the voters before expenditures are made for the new use.

We do not have a date for the District Court action. However, the case has been assigned to District Court Judge Richard G. Blane, II.

Many volunteer hours have been spent researching the records of the Des Moines School Board, the Iowa Code, the Iowa Administrative Code and case law as it applies to these challenges. The process we are following is very simple and well-established though very time consuming! Several people have been willing to provide financial support. Bruce Johnson is our attorney.

Afterwords From Some Who Ran

Jim Patch

I want to thank the citizens of Des Moines for the opportunity to serve you as a School Board Member. During the past three years, I have had the privilege to meet many people who are concerned about the education of our children, and the educational process.

This past election must be a real wake up call to the Administration and Board. The citizens of Des Moines have exercised their right. They have shown us that they are paying attention to educational issues, and don't like what they are seeing.

I congratulate the candidates who were successful in their pursuit of a seat on the Board. I encourage those of us who did not accomplish that goal and invite those who did, to work for improved educational goals and standards, more educational opportunities for students, better fiscal oversight, to listen to the teaching professionals and staff to create better working conditions for District employees and superior learning environments for students. I would hope that we do everything we can to encourage our student to attend school through graduation, including keeping viable technical-vocational programs, providing music, art, industrial arts programs and returning Librarians to all the schools.

As for me, I will now get to take a vacation longer than two weeks. But you will see me once again in the board room, talking about educational issues. Not from the comfort of the posh seats – but rather from the podium addressing the board about educational issues of my choosing. Thank You Des Moines.

Trudy McCormick

Campaigning was a learning experience. I am not as naïve as I was five weeks ago!

Throughout the campaign I spoke truthfully, from my heart. I was running for all our kids, their families, and our community. For 34 years I was an advocate for my kindergartners. Now, it is time I advocate for all students!

Our students and our schools must be saved! Joining SOS is the right thing for me to do! Just tell me when, where, and what needs to be done. I'll be there!

I promise . . . and I don't break my promises!

Dick Murphy

Dear SOS members,

Thank you for your participation in the election process 2005. I know not all of you supported me as there were several good candidates to choose from. I know that each of you followed events, paid attention to issues, and questioned candidates. This is how it is supposed to work.

Now, as we enter a new phase of school development in Des Moines, I am asking all of you to keep it up. This year, we increased the turnout over last year. Next year, let's increase it even more. If we don't show interest and passion, others will make decisions independent of community concerns. That is why SOS is a necessary community organization. I know that not everyone in the organization agrees with each other. That is what makes it a viable organization and we need you to help us as we move forward making decisions about how to best educate our kids.

During the July 12 school board meeting, I prefaced my comments with a statement that I was proud to live in Des Moines because of the people (you) who were there expressing their opinions, sharing research, and demanding the attention of public officials. I still mean that.

Jeanette Woods

WOW! Thank you! Thank You! Thank You!

What an experience! WE all made it happen.

I would like to THANK all of you from the bottom of my heart for your support and hard work. When I believe in something I put my heart and soul into it, and I believe with the help of all of the wonderful people I have met, we can make Des Moines Public Schools the best for all students. We learned a lesson from this election; if the community puts our resources together we can do anything.

You have helped get me elected. Now please don't leave me out here alone. Again, thank you all for your support.

Editors Note: All candidates were invited to submit comments. Only four responded.

This Week's SOS Reporter

- SOS Chair Comments
- SOS Sees SB Victory
- Coordinator's Comments
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- Upcoming Issues;
- The Cotton Report
- SOS Profiles
- Election Review

Chair: Linda Westergaard • Coordinator: Nancy Stillians
 S.O.S. - Save Our Schools •
 P.O. Box 1358 • WebSite: www.DM-SOS.org
 Des Moines, Ia 50305-1358 • E-Mail: issues@DM-SOS.org