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RE: Letter to the Editor, Isthmus, February 11 issue, page 8, "Talking Out of School"

Madison School Board member Carol Carstensen complains that critics of the Board aren't really interested in seeking solutions to complex questions. She states that "I get a little concerned when people say, 'You should be doing this,' but then are unable to give me a better plan for how to achieve what they want." The significant issue here is that Ms. Carstensen is unwilling and unable to consider, discuss and evaluate other processes, approaches, criteria and recommendations for alternatives and solutions. As a representative of Active Citizens for Education (ACE) I am one of the critics of the Board to whom she specifically refers in her above statements. We have presented her, along with the entire Board of Education, and the district administration with numerous recommendations, plans and proposals which are matters of record with Board of Education. Specific recommendations, proposals and solutions have been offered in such areas as maintenance, after school programs, Community Services Fund 80, the budgeting process, extra-curricular activities funding, administration costs and staffing levels, cost analysis of programs and services, and many more. For the most part, these suggestions and requests have been ignored and, more often than not, derided. "Complex" problems for Ms. Carstensen and the majority of the Board members are not discussed as matters of public policy and are not discussed and decided upon with complete and accurate information. Even more seriously, most decisions made by the Board are made in isolation of one another, thereby ignoring the interrelationships and consequences of choices and long term impacts. Some examples of this piecemeal decision making process include the Leopold elementary school building initiative, reading instruction programs, maintenance projects, attendance boundaries and school closings, fees for extra-curricular activities and coordination for fine arts programs. We have statements written by Board members that say they have the best ideas, they will make the decisions that are best for the district and they don't need the help of others to do that. The message from the majority of the Board is that if the ideas of others are not in agreement with theirs the ideas of others are not worthy of consideration. That mentality is not conducive to the consideration of the processes and solutions proposed by others to the "complex" problems for which the Board already believes it has the correct answer. In the meantime, the "school house" is tumbling down under the weight of their arrogance. Ms. Carstensen brags about her 15 years of experience as a member of the Board. I dare say it is more like one year of experience fifteen times. We have consistently and vigorously offered ways and means to seek better informed decisions and solutions and to partner with our elected representatives in seeking to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the school district that belongs to all of us and not just to them.

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