

**Dick Bernard**  
**Woodbury MN 55125-2421**  
**dick.bernarddt1878@icloud.com**  
**<https://thoughtstowardsabetterworld.org>**  
**<https://amilioncopies.info>**

May 4, 2024

To: all Anoka-Hennepin School Board members, Superintendent, Teachers Union President and Vice-President

Dear Colleague Public Educators:

I am an 84-year-old who lived/worked in Anoka-Hennepin SD #11 (A-H) 1965-1982. I've followed your recent issue on the front page of the Star Tribune, and other controversies in A-H in recent years. I'm a partisan towards what is described as the Progressive side. I have long publicly labelled myself a "moderate pragmatic Democrat".

The temptation might be to dismiss and discard my opinion. I hope you do not. While I have no "power". I do have history. I will summarize my personal biography at the end of this letter. FYI, this is the first time in my retirement – now 24 years, all in the Twin Cities area – where I've felt a need to weigh in on a school district policy issue. I begin with the premise that every school/school district is a diverse community, diverse in many ways. I know this from extensive and diverse personal experience.

(Presently, I have a daughter who is a long-time Middle School Principal and another daughter who is a full-time substitute teacher, both in large twin cities metropolitan area schools. My youngest grandchild is a high school junior. Both my parents were career public school teachers in tiny ND schools, from the later 1920s to early 1970s.)

For over 30 years I have watched "from the playing field" the intensifying campaign to control what school age children can be exposed to. This is especially true now. I am talking about basic rights of children to grow up, as children always have and always will: to hopefully mature into solid citizens who contribute positively to the world they are and will be part of. General societal norms have been in place for generations. This seems to have evolved into a lose-lose battle which has made A-H front page news, again.

I have nine grandchildren, the oldest now 37 years old, all positive contributors to society, all unique. I'm personally aware of the realities of living and learning as played out in the real-world children live in today. There is no cage that can be devised to protect them from the real world that they will have to enter as an adult.

My time remaining is limited; theirs is just beginning and will be initially and only temporarily determined for good or ill by others, mostly of your generation.

I am not suggesting open season on everything that seems to be the basis of the conversation these days. Civil dialogue and mutual respect, not power, should dominate conversation and debate. I'm thinking of the environment at the time I first arrived in Anoka-Hennepin in 1965, in Blaine, at then-new Roosevelt Junior High.

The environment in 1965-66 was not perfect. It never has been, it never will be. This past week I looked at the 1966-67 Roosevelt Junior High School annual. RJH was grades 7-9 then. The photos of the approximately 1300 students showed only about a half dozen who didn't appear to be white. I didn't look for "funny" names; my guess is there were very few. Of course, I didn't hear any different languages. Special Education was still evolving. Organized special interest parent advocacy was just beginning. Etc.

I know public education; and parochial, Montessori, home school, charter.... All have imperfections. In the long run, though, public education is the best – in the long run, we all must live with others with different beliefs, traditions, etc.

Over the years there have been incremental improvements: legislation and policies on things like bullying; refinement and improvement of special education, on and on. Improvements were accomplished by one form or another of negotiation, as opposed to imposition of will by whomever might be the majority at any given time. In the instant case in your district, a 3-3 vote could have conceivably led to a shutdown – hopefully this has been avoided.

What bothers me most is the effort, by no means only in A-H, of a particular special interest to impose on all certain perceived standards about things like race, gender, religion.... You all know what I mean. There might be the dream of creating the perfect school and childhood. It will not happen. Equally, there may be the nightmare of fear about them, whatever group "them" happens to be. (I happen to be Catholic, with six years of Catholic Elementary School. Back when I was growing up in rural North Dakota, "Catholic" hardly qualified as "Christian" to some. People like Muslims and Jews and "negroes" and "Indians" and the like were not even part of the conversation. All this has changed, and I think that is all for the best for all of us.)

I was part of your school district for 17 years. Granted, that ended over 40 years ago, my 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 1965-66 (who are now over 70) were not much different than the 8<sup>th</sup> graders of today, albeit today's young people are exposed to much more by the simple reality of today's access to information – whether the information is true or not seems to make much difference. There might be a temptation to try to go back to the good old simple days we like to imagine. It will not happen.

In sum: I taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade geography in your district for 7 years, long ago. This meant 5 classes of about 30 or more students, 45 minutes for an entire school year. The kids couldn't choose their teacher; we couldn't choose them. Not every day was the same. All of us came to school from home, however defined, each day. Each of us were individuals. Somehow, we survived, and, I'd guess, mostly did okay in our lives. I wish the kids, of today and tomorrow, success, and I wish you all the ability to work together.

Sincerely,



### **Brief biography**

**My first Minnesota ancestor (French-Canadian)** came to **Dayton** about 1853; another to Centerville in Anoka County in 1857, both before statehood.

**Came to Anoka-Hennepin 1965.** Third year of teaching. Wife died three days after I signed my contract. – kidney disease. Our son turned 60 in February 2024.

**Junior high geography** at Roosevelt Jr. High, Blaine, 1965-72

When my sister came home from Peace Corps in 1968, she initially lived with my son and I and taught junior high at then Sandburg Junior High.

**Hired as Field Staff for MEA (Education Minnesota) in 1972;** at Anoka-Hennepin till 1982. Time of first negotiated contract, first grievances to binding arbitration, first implementation of Meet and Confer. Title IX, maternity leave, Election Districts for school board. Etc.

**Two of my children attended 6 District 11 schools.** The oldest attended Franklin, Sandburg, Ramsey, Lincoln, Fred Moore and through 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Anoka Senior High (this was the time of explosive growth of the school district – 2000 students a year.)

**1972-2000** Field staff for MEA/Education Minnesota

**2000-2001** President of Minnesota School Public Relations Association. Over ten preceding years on Board of MinnSPRA. Colleagues included Mary Olson and Karen George of District 11.

**Both parents were career public school teachers.**

**Two daughters in public education.**

**1966-67 at Roosevelt:** <https://thoughtstowardsabetterworld.org/junior-high/> (Feb 10, 2024)