

Dear Editor,

I want to start this letter by acknowledging how difficult it must be to be a school board member—the enormous time commitment and the risks you take publicly standing up for your beliefs knowing that regardless of your position on an issue someone will be criticizing you. I am grateful to our current and past board members for your efforts on behalf of our children.

I had an opportunity at various points throughout the last two RTSD budget cycles to be one of many parents working together to advocate that: the students come first; quality teachers are the most essential ingredient in quality education; and, the process of decision-making needs to be thoughtful, strategic and transparent. It was an eye-opening and frustrating experience. At the end of an exhaustive and coordinated effort by many, I was convinced that we had absolutely no influence on the Board's decisions and that the system lacked accountability. I learned that the public process was one of comment and presentation rather than dialogue. I had not yet heard the board articulate a compelling educational strategy guiding their budget decisions. And, despite promises that the administration would identify and track key metrics to measure impact of the program modifications, I have not seen this information.

I do not know a lot about politics, but I know the current formula is not working as well as it needs to. I believe we need new leaders on the Board and I will be voting for Sheila Palmer. As a Radnor Elementary School (RES) parent, I have had the privilege of watching Sheila in action as the RES PTO President for two consecutive years. She worked tirelessly to improve our school with an emphasis on better communication and a more aggressive and creative approach to fundraising. As a parent with children in the Radnor elementary, middle and high schools, Sheila understands the perspective of a wide range of parents. In her work as PTO president, she has gained a deeper insight into the challenges and responsibilities of the teachers and administrators. As a member of the Radnor Education Foundation Grants Committee, she knows how private funds can supplement public resources. Her professional life in finance gave her experience balancing programmatic goals with fiscal realities. Sheila has been consistently committed to understanding the various perspectives and to finding the common ground. She has been promoting constructive partnerships, real dialogue and the need for an overarching educational vision and strategy for several years.

While Sheila and I have had differences of opinion on some of the issues, I am not making my decision based solely on the issues. I know that over a four-year term many issues will arise that we can't even anticipate at this point. I am casting my vote for Sheila because I respect that she is a straight shooter. She says exactly what she means and does what she says she will do. Sheila doesn't focus on the problem, she provides solutions. With Sheila on the board I know the process of decision-making will be thoughtful, transparent, strategic, and data-driven with the needs of the students at the forefront. Sheila has the passion, the commitment, experience, and skills to effectively serve on the Radnor School Board. Please vote on November 8th—our kids are counting on you!

Sincerely,

Martie Bernicker
Villanova