

To the Editor:

Recently, Dr. Joshua Starr, Stamford's School Superintendent, sent a 2,000+ word e-mail to a broad distribution list as his initial response to a Middle School Reform Op-ed that ran in the Advocate on October, 22nd. His follow up "public" version appeared as an Op-ed in the Advocate on October 29th.

Dr. Starr's point-of-view is deeply disturbing. Throughout history, demonizing or dehumanizing opposing perspectives has proven to be a nasty, yet effective tactic, especially when one's argument can't stand solely on its own merits. It is certainly not a path we would expect from the head of our schools and a leader of this community. This is exactly the road, however, that Dr. Starr has gone down with respect to the Middle School Reform debate. Categorizing people, good people, in a manner that defines them as segregationists, elitists, and wanting to "keep people down" is so off-base and wrong that his words reek of libel. Grossly manipulating facts and stating things that simply are not true is confusing, misleading and unfair to the citizens of this city. Dr. Starr has taken what should be a vigorous, productive debate and he has made it personal, nasty and off-topic. (A full review/response regarding Dr. Starr's Op-ed can be seen at: www.stamfordree.org.) His behavior is more consistent with that of a bully than a man of reason.

Here is truth, neither adulterated, nor "massaged":

- The Stamford Residents for Excellence in Education *support* the vast proportion of Middle School Reforms. We believe that the program represents much progress.
- We *do* question the broad-scale immediate implementation of a two-group structure when there has been inadequate lead-time, preparation, piloting, funding, learning, and revision. Why is it wrong to understand what works, what doesn't and then moving forward with a game plan that incorporates real experience *in our city*?
- SREE *does* believe that two groups are not sufficient in subjects like math and reading. We believe that *flexible grouping* where students are supported and learn based on need and ability (and then move up or down based on progress) is a viable option that should be explored. THIS IS NOT TRACKING! *This direction already works in a Stamford school (one of the best in the state) that is half children of color.* How is this preventing students from "attaining a high-quality education"?

Are the three points above so heinously evil and unreasonable that they should be arbitrarily set aside by the Superintendent and some Board of Education members? Do these people have so little faith in the substance of their own case? Must those who do not share Dr. Starr's every view be cast out of his circle of influence?

This entire exercise of Middle School Reform could have been an extraordinary journey of community growth *because there is so much alignment*. Instead, our Superintendent has chosen to divide. I am profoundly disturbed because of the attacks on me personally, and I grieve for this community because of the ridiculous circus this process has become.

-Alan Stockman, 10/29/10