

Fosters Daily Democrat

Timidity is not road to a better education

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Rochester magnet school proposal holds great promise

Many hours and much work have gone into developing plans for a magnet school in Rochester, the first of its kind in the state of New Hampshire.

Foster's Daily Democrat understands such a bold proposal is going to face questioning and opposition, but on Thursday the Rochester School Board's Instruction Committee voted down the program for the wrong reason.

As reported in Friday's edition of Foster's Daily Democrat, the proposal for the school failed in a 3-2 vote, with committee members Dan Harkinson, Laurie Beaulieu, and Sue O'Connor voting against it. Committee members Anne Grassie and Anthony Pastelis, members of the magnet school steering committee, voted in favor of the proposal.

In explaining his opposition, committee member Dan Harkinson unwittingly highlighted what critics argue is wrong with our public school system.

"Part of me feels like the Grinch at Christmas," he said. "I have no quarrel with the notion that adding 20 days to the school year will improve educational opportunities for our students, but I do disagree with the notion that offering an improved education to 7.5 percent of K-5 students is going to be what we want to do."

In other words, if all our K-5 kids can't have it then none can.

Harkinson's words support the notion that public education is aimed at the lowest common denominator. God forbid the Rochester School System would do something for just 7.5 percent of its students.

Nevermind that the starting 7.5 percent could, over time, turn into 10 percent then 15 percent. Nevermind this experiment could grow into something so successful that it eventually restructures Rochester's entire school system.

Nevermind that Rochester could substantively dispel the notion that public schools are willing to sacrifice the good of a few so as not to offend the many.

Such a milquetoast philosophy serves no one while threatening the good of all in the long run.

Of course, Foster's does not believe for a moment that Harkinson represents the majority. And thankfully, it is the School Board which will have final say. When that time comes, Foster's urges the board's membership to step forward boldly, rather than cower in fear as Harkinson has done.

It is our hope the School Board will listen to the entreaty of Instruction Committee member Anthony Pastelis, who first proposed the magnet school.

As noted in our news report, parental involvement is key to the school and that the school is meant to be a school of choice. The school's proposed 200-day calendar will one day be common practice in the country, he said, adding he does not want to be part of a School Board that is "going to prepare students for anything but the best possible jobs."

To that end, the Rochester School Board should not let naysayers rule the day. Instead the School Board should seize the opportunity given it by the exhaustive work of the Instruction Committee and the community, which has shown a keen interest in the project.

As roman lyric poet Horace advised — carpe diem.