

Suzanne Lima, 2nd grade teacher at Millbrook School and Evergreen Teacher's Association Vice President.

So I heard that a board member said he believes in things like fully funded classrooms, smaller class sizes and professional development for teachers, but he doesn't see the "Union" fighting for these.

Now just for the moment, let's put a pin in the first problem with this statement which has to do with a board member saying he is not in favor of things like raising class sizes.

Let me instead start with idea that "the union" doesn't fight for things that have to do with our children, our students. First, I'm slightly perplexed at the way our union is used as a third person or an outside entity. Does this board not understand that "the union" is just us, the teachers?? That I am the union? That every teacher in the District is the union? Our union is a body of teachers who work together to first and foremost collectively, with one voice, therefore effectively, bargain a contract.

With that said, I can just hear what you're thinking now. You just said it. You bargain a contract so therefore you teachers just look out for yourselves.

To which I say, are you kidding me? Are you that misinformed? Everything we fight for has to do with children. Let's start with that issue we put a pin in at the beginning of my speech. The one where you say you are in favor of keeping smaller class sizes and we, the teachers of this community do not fight for such things. Who has proposed at the table raising class sizes and cutting the Art Program in half? Teachers?? No. The District, under direction from this board. And, Who has refused to agree to that current proposal that hurts our students in those areas and other ways as well? That's right, the teachers. Us, the teachers, who sit at the table with an equal voice. Who because we stand together, as a union, and speak collectively, can say no when the District makes demands that hurt our students.

It's ironic to hear board members say we don't fight for our student's programs, when we have spent our entire careers 100% focused on meeting the needs of our children. Where we are criticized for wanting to be able to afford to live in the area we teach, keep up with inflation, provide for our families (modestly I might add). Because when you really understand that paying a livable wage, a competitive wage, along with decent HC, not only raises the quality of life for our families, but it raises the quality of teachers in the classroom, then you begin to see how everything we fight for has to do with our children.

It's hard to not be offended by seemingly flippant comments that attempt to undermine our integrity, our passion, our dedication in order to malign us in front of and to the very community we diligently serve. Everything we do, everything we fight for, is centered around our students. Try as you might to twist us, our union, into something self serving, you will not be able to. We have always fought for our students. And we are not going to stop now.