Written by Fred Easter
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NOBODY ASKED ME, but I remember now why I was so sorry that Chris Stewart and T Williams left the Minneapolis School Board. The Board of Education, the community, and all Minneapolis school kids should be sorry, too. Those two men brought a level of thoughtfulness and professionalism to the Board that has not been matched by two of their replacements. I went to the April 17 School Board meeting to watch the Board explain away its expected ratification of the newest contract with the Teacher's Union. Chris and T, along with a host of other citizens, urged the Board to go back to the Union and strengthen the contract to include the deeper changes necessary to close the achievement gap. Their objections and observations were predictably well reasoned, well organized and carefully delivered. Other contributions, notably Lynnell Mickelsen's, were peppered with carefully worded insights and delivered lovingly. To be sure, there was passion, but never was there disrespect for the offices or the office holders.

As Board Chair Monserrate noted, the directors are elected, public officials, and can withstand stated differences of opinion. Except, apparently, some of them can't. Dick Mammen seems programmed to acknowledge only the adulation of his bosses in the Union. Any suggestion of an opposing point-of-view, particularly if opined by Bill English, reduces him to a petulant teenager. He responded by attacking people by name and casting aspersions on the great work they and others have done. This last announces his lack of knowledge and demonstrates an even more pitiful lack of concern about facts. It should be beneath all public officials. It used to be beneath our School Board Directors.

Given the protracted, acrimonious contract negotiations we have been treated to in the past, it seems reasonable for School Board directors to vow to cooperate with the Teacher's Union. It is, however, unseemly for those vows to be written on Minneapolis Federation of Teachers stationary. That points up the fact that the Federation recruits candidates, works hard to get them elected and then holds their feet to the fire. This turns cooperation into capitulation. On what stationary is the vow to work for all students written.

But, of course, that is how the democratic process works. I wouldn't change it if I could. But, I do applaud, and urge you to join hands with "Put Kids First." That is our best chance to get the democratic process to work for Minneapolis's school children. Yes! Pay teachers. Yes! Support teachers in the classroom. But, put the most effective teachers in front of your kids, irrespective of their time in grade, or you will never close the gap. Putting teachers first is how we got to this point and it's too much like trying to get different results by doing the same thing.

There's a word for that.