

POSITION PAPER

DANIEL J. DE KOK SR.

CANDIDATE FOR NASD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2021

EDUCATION

- Bachelor of Music (Music Education), The University of Michigan
- Master of Music (Conducting), Western Michigan University
- Master of Science (Library Science), Clarion University of Pennsylvania

WORK HISTORY

15 years in K-12 music education (PA, NJ, TX)

10 years in retail management and sales

10 years in professional and paraprofessional work in public and academic libraries

40+ years as a freelance trombonist and vocalist

I believe in providing the strongest, most appropriate K-12 education to all of the Norristown Area School District's stakeholders. To that end, I submit the following ideas as key to achieving that goal:

BUILDING SOLID CITIZENS

Education professionals wear many hats during their career, most importantly as the “adult in the room”—leaders that students trust and can depend on for solid guidance, answering the tough questions on uncomfortable topics. Children have myriad distractions that keep them from fulfilling their potential, but we can't be distracted in our drive to give them the skills and strategies for when it's their turn to be the adult in the room. Someone much wiser than I once said, “it takes a village to raise a child”. It's true, and it also takes a willingness to learn, not only on the student's part, but collectively on our part.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

My high school class of around 400 students was not diverse; we did have about 10% Latinx, and one—that's 1—African American student. That same high school in 2021 more closely

resembles today's Norristown Area High School. It's a much different world today, one that demands that all stakeholders have a say, that all that seek inclusion have access. Children in 2021 have access to opportunities that their parents and grandparents may only have dreamed of. While society as a whole has made significant progress, it would be naïve to state that that work has been completed. We must continue to educate; we must continue to work; we must continue to press on.

FISCAL INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of my earliest memories of attending school board meetings here in the NASD involved a series of questions regarding school financing. I was stunned to hear the response that “it's really hard to explain...it's hard to understand”—as though we were wasting our time asking for answers to what should have been routine questions. Unfortunately, it's not the only time I was witness to such dismissive language in a NASD School Board meeting or from school board members. A real effort needs to be made not only in improving response to taxpayer concerns, but to be more assertive in informing the public. Incessantly blaming the state and federal government for budgetary woes is not productive. Continuing to seek support from private, non-profit, and public sources of funding, while not the be-all, end-all, needs to be more aggressively pursued.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The recruitment and retention of the strongest education professional personnel possible should be the goal of the NASD. Norristown should not simply be a step on one's educational career for teachers, coaches, or administrators. It's going to take all stakeholders, whether they have children in NASD schools or not, to improve our image, and to make our best better.

SCHOOL CHOICE

Our family moved to Norristown in February of 2004. We were able to place our children in Catholic school, but for various reasons, moved them to Renaissance Academy in Phoenixville. Our oldest daughter found it to her liking and graduated from RA. Our son and youngest daughter transferred to Norristown Area High School and found much to their liking, particularly the ample opportunities in the performing arts. My wife Nancy and I were deeply impressed by the efforts of our children's teachers to reach and guide each student along the most appropriate path. I am an advocate for school choice, with the caveat that one of those choices must be the strongest public K-12 schools possible. It does take all of us—parents, students, education professionals, community members, and business leaders—to ensure that that becomes a reality.

VOCATIONAL/DISTRIBUTIVE EDUCATION

Vocational education has long been seen as second prize, a second-class educational track, but nothing could be further from the truth. People in the building trades, the medical world, the culinary arts, and business—as well as the people they serve—have benefited from this training. It should be the NASD's goal to provide maximum opportunity through partnerships with the appropriate business communities to make this happen on a broader scale.