

2020 Candidate Questionnaire - School Regionalization - 2 short questions!

As a 2020 candidate for Middletown or Newport Town Councils or School Committee - CITIZENS EXPLORING SCHOOL UNIFICATION is asking ALL candidates to REPLY to 2 questions below. The responses will be published on our website, social media, and with all local media outlets. CANDIDATES who DO NOT RESPOND to the survey - CESU will publish that you DECLINED to participate in the survey. DEADLINE to complete is August 31, 2020, *if you have questions about this survey - send an email to info@cesu.news We will reply within 24-hours.

Email address *

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First and Last Name *

Frances Connolly Moldveen

What position are you running for? *

- Town Council
- School Committee

Do you support an updated study of school regionalization between Newport and Middletown? *

Yes

No

Other: _____

Why OR Why Not? Please describe your position in detail (1,000-word limit)! *

School unification or regionalization is an incredibly loaded subject. I know that for some it is very cut and dry, but for an equal number of individuals it is littered with holes, fears and question marks. I come from a unified district; three towns in one district. It started with two towns and then then the third was added many years after the first partnership. These were small towns in Iowa, the issues paled in comparison to unifying two larger, deeply rooted communities.

Both districts have unique problems to solve, the larger issue for me is that neither is "healthy". One example is math proficiency; Middletown is at 39% and Newport is at 20%. The adage, "two wrongs don't make a right", is very applicable. Building a strong, healthy, flexible and advanced school district requires towns/cities that are willing to place education first.

Roger's is crumbling, literally. The town population is just over 24,000. The high school has a student body of 666 students and 51 teachers. The FY 2020 budget was just over \$27 million. Middletown is also very aged. The town population is just over 16,000. The high school has a student body of 590 and 56 teachers. The FY 2020 budget was just over \$39.5 million.

Twelve million dollars is a significant difference in funding for schools. Newport has a RRE tax rate of 9.99%. Middletown has a RRE tax rate of 13.76%. The same gap exists for the Commercial tax rate, 14.98% and 18.20% respectively. Four points is a large gap, especially considering the cost of real estate in both towns. I was told by a realtor, who works all over the island and beyond, that one of the reasons the prices can be as high as they are is in part due to the low tax rates. Which of course benefits agents, but not the towns ability to care for its citizens. Case in point, there was a recent fundraising effort, driven by private citizens, to deal with the massive garbage issue on the streets of Newport. Keeping the streets clean and the sidewalks free of trash should not be something that private citizens should have to fund, that is what taxes are for.

All of this to say, I would be in full support of a unified school that was uniformly valued and invested in by each town. I would be in full support of providing more and better CTE's or pathways for our students, so they do not choose to enroll in other districts that the home district must pay for. I would be in full support of creating a unified school system that better serves our bi-lingual/non-English speaking populations. I would be in full support of a unified school system that catered to individual learning styles, allowing students to bloom and thrive in their unique learning abilities rather than making them feel that something is wrong if they need it delivered in a different format.

Children are unique, like fingerprints, or snowflakes. John D. Rockefeller (who created the General Board of Education in 1903) said, "I don't want a nation of thinkers, I want a nation of workers." This is the sad truth about the path our public education has taken. Children should be allowed to grow as their make-up was designed for them to grow. Not all subjects, or tools are grasped at the same time by all students. Standardized testing in RI schools is out of control. It feels as though every other week one of my children tells me that they are doing testing from one test or another. Teaching to the test is failing our student's ability to wrestle with and master subjects. Our schools also do not require memorization. Why not? Those who preach it as antiquated have clearly never sat with a fifth grader, trying to teach fractions, and the student must look at a chart to answer 8x5.

If Middletown and Newport are to successfully regionalize, then I would challenge Middletown and Newport to steer away from the status quo. I would challenge them to take a good, hard look at where we are failing and why. I would challenge them to return to tried and true classical methods and ideologies. Technology can and should be incorporated. However, thinkers should be able to read and write and debate, factor and wrestle with information. Technology is a tool. The use of tools must be taught; we do not teach technology to our students, which became fantastically apparent during distance learning. We give them a computer and expect them to use it; we do not even teach them how to type. Aristotle said, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." This can be true. I can put together amazing ingredients and create a beautiful cake. I can also, like Dr. Frankenstein, create a monster. The past six months have brought to the surface, into the light, many things that have needed to be addressed, but have been kicked down the road. I understand CESU's desire to have a fair look, to be able to have the discussions and really investigate what the possibilities are for our districts. I am in full support of that end. However, our current state-of-affairs makes it impossible to give this effort the vetting it deserves.

Our schools and towns are fully focused on, and overwhelmed with, simply starting school. I would ask the CESU to use this time for more research, more conversations, more solutions. I would hate for this effort to be swept away, to be considered annoying and absurd because we are literally trying to schedule class bathroom time for our students during "in-person" learning.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this subject. I would be happy to further discuss this topic at your leisure.

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