

Press Release 4/15/2021

Erik Polkowski running for re-election for Akron Board of Education

Education. The word immediately raises our self-definition as the instruction of reading, writing and arithmetic. It is a basic set of skills that we, as a community, believe will assist and guide the next generation into the roles of tomorrow. It stirs up the thoughts of our own path and experience. But the landscape is ever changing. Are we ready?

The past twelve months have been difficult. We have had to open our eyes to look at education in new ways. Everything from its identity to delivery has been impacted. Academics to athletics. Mental, social, and physical health. Each aspect has raised its own set of concerns and needs, leading us to address them with viable solutions. All the while, each day brings a new set of directions. From recommendations to restrictions, all by outside agencies, to all of which, a district is held accountable.

My name is Erik Polkowski, and I am running for re-election to the Akron Board of Education. As a member of the Akron Newstead community for the past 24 years, it is the place my family calls home. My son Riley is a 2019 ACS graduate. My daughter Emerson is an ACS HS junior. Both have attended Akron since kindergarten. With a large extended family, there are relatives in each building among many of the grade levels. My wife Melissa and I have been active ACS parents, volunteering in everything from class activities like homecoming floats, to working with the Akron Music Parents and PTA. I have worked with athletic teams and as an ACS substitute bus driver. I recognize size and diversity of our district. I know that the school is a central unifying element within our town.

Outside of the school, I have met the needs of the community through leadership. I currently serve on the Trinity Lutheran Church council and have served on the Akron Celebration Committee and the Akron Sports board. I have been a member of the Newstead Planning Board for twelve years. As a small business owner on Main Street, I understand the many issues faced in daily operations and the need for long term strategies. A twenty-five-year veteran in the field of commercial construction and engineering, I have a broad perspective and knowledge of the industry that I carry with me.

As a school board member, I have served as vice president for the past two years. I have served as a board representative on district interview panels and as a part of the construction team for the current capital improvement project. In 2020, I was recognized for my service to the board earning the ECASB Shining Star Award. I am the district liaison for the Erie County Association of School Boards Legislative team. Over the three years in this position, I have meet with both NYS Senate (District 61 & 62) and both NYS Assembly (District 144 & 139) representatives, locally and in Albany. I have advocated in person to Erie County Legislator Greene, former US Congressman Collins, and US Senator Schumer on the district's behalf. Each time I highlight the needs of the larger school community, our local region and specific concerns of our district. These interactions have brought about important relationships, including with board members from other WNY school districts. These actions have and will continue to aid the district in meeting its mission.

I take pride in representing the people of the community. I am always accessible to listen to concerns, or have conversations regarding the activities and direction the school is heading. The upcoming three years this the next board term will see many concerns that will need to be addressed. First, the return to in person instruction is critical. Students need the one-on-one interaction with teachers and classmates. It is needed for the mental and social health of all students. Second, while a full return is important, assessment and assistance to students is vitally important. We have lost valuable time over the past year. An impact can already be seen in our students. Steps are needed to be put in place to help students recover and return them to the instructional levels expected. Third, there is a fiscal cliff approaching. A few years back, there was the Gap Elimination Adjustment. This was a plan by the state to account for lost revenue and a state funding shortfall. Over five years, the GEA removed billions from schools. The GEA was my initial reason for becoming a school board member. Currently, due to the current economic climate, a shortfall is on the horizon. Once monies from federal stimulus run dry, the burden of funding will return. It could signal a return of a GEA variant. The next few years will require careful planning to prepare for and actively navigate the district through.

My focus is clear. My commitment absolute. Lead as through the eyes of the student. My name is Erik Polkowski and I welcome a vote of your support in the upcoming Akron Board of Education election May 18th. Thank you.