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## Fischer has been in it for the kids

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### **New London**

It was during an impromptu conversation with some New London High School kids last week that the topic of superintendent Nick Fischer's ensuing dismissal — no semantics here, Fischer was dismissed — arose. What followed was more evidence that in brevity, there is poetry.

"Sucks," a student said. "Cool guy."

They like Fischer, as do I, because he is visible. He supports them in their endeavors, athletic and otherwise, far from the stereotype of the administrator in the fancy suit removed from the realism of every day, but versed in "capacity building for the whole student," "building consensus," "developing more high touch messaging strategies" and other varieties of education-speak.

That's not Fischer.

He's the guy with bleacher butt. He's at all the games, wearing his green and gold. He talks to the kids. You know. The kids. Exactly whom the board should serve first, second and third, well before its whims and whiffs of personality conflicts.

Fischer's dismissal retards the progress of the school system and issues another exasperating example of how New London's wheels spin furiously, but with no traction.

Lament, however, rarely furthers the movement. Hence, we must resist using four-letter words to describe the behavior of every Board of Education member not named Bill Morse and focus on the power city residents still possess.

There is precedent in New London that trumpets the power of the people. Their resonance and unity once forced the Board of Education to overturn a decision under the same circumstances.

It was July 27, 2000 when New Londoners packed a meeting and lectured board members about their treatment of former superintendent of schools Julian Stafford. They spoke passionately, albeit misguidedly, it turned out. One man, Larry Lewis, threatened a hunger strike.

Forget that Stafford couldn't run a tag sale, let alone a school system. The message of the people was received nonetheless. The Board, which originally voted not to extend Stafford's contract, reversed its decision.

City residents, who are the first to complain about how bad schools dissuade families from moving here and thus provide no relief to the few, the proud, who pay taxes, should ask themselves a question: Is this fight worth it?

Answer: As opposed to two more years of what-ifs, maybes, couldas, shouldas and wouldas with a lame duck superintendent?

Then there's this: The school system is better now than when Fischer got here. True enough, it was hard to get worse. But progress has happened. New London High School was rated the most improved high school in the state in terms of student achievement. Nathan Hale Elementary School has been designated a School of Distinction.

How can even the most ardent cynic fail to acknowledge such progress?

The kids like the guy. They are achieving more. That must supersede whatever personality conflicts Fischer has with Board members. It must. Because it's about the kids. That old line. Wouldn't it be nice if one city somewhere actually understood what "about the kids" really means?

I'm not trying to make Fischer into a combination of Albert Einstein and Albert Schweitzer. He's done some things with which I disagree. Teachers I like a lot have called here to express their disapproval. Conflicts happen.

But how can you argue with the kids and their accomplishments?

Nick Fischer cares. So does his wife, Karen, who volunteers her time with the kids as much as anyone else this corner of the world. She helps coordinate the after-school academic support program three afternoons per week. She's headed a coat drive. She's staffed the concession stand at football and basketball games. She joined parents Maryellen Tudisco and Connie Fields in working with athletes to ensure they are qualified through the NCAA clearinghouse, the official eligibility center.

Hell, I saw Nick Fischer pick up the bill one night from his own pocket at Mr. G's, the night the boys' basketball team won the state championship at Mohegan Sun three years ago. Craig Parker, the coach, was celebrating with friends and family only to learn at the end of the night that the night was on Nick and Karen Fischer.

Do the citizens of New London really believe these people should be tossed out on their ascots?

Do the citizens of New London believe their Board members are as interested in the kids as the Fischers?

We'll find out. The next Board meeting is May 23 at the Magnet School's lecture hall.

If you value education in this city — and all it encompasses — you'll show up and make yourself heard.

All of you who believe that "for the kids" actually means something.

This is the opinion of Day sports columnist Mike DiMauro.