



# RIDGEWOOD

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## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**The Ridgewood News**  
**Superintendent's Corner**  
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**by**  
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### **We Must Protect Our Public Schools**

*The following column appeared in The Ridgewood News on April 7, 2017.*

As superintendent of a public school district, I am, not surprisingly, a strong advocate for public education. While public schools have unique challenges, they proudly exist to serve the needs of our democratic society, which upholds the right to an education for every child. Springing from this deep-rooted commitment to educate all students regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender orientation or ability, is the opportunity to create unique and exciting learning communities that are diverse, open and inclusive.

Recent developments in Trenton and Washington raise cause for concern for the preservation and future of public school education.

In New Jersey, a public education is a constitutional responsibility that depends on longstanding, critical state and federal funding to help meet the costly requirement to serve all students regardless of their special gifts, differences or challenges. Although the government has long recognized that its monetary support is necessary for the viability of public education, the current federal budget proposal calls for substantial decreases in education funding, along with an initiative that would offer parents vouchers to use public funds to send their children to private schools. The voucher system – a form of outsourcing -- poses a direct threat to our public education system by jeopardizing the very funding that we need to operate.

It is troubling.

I believe that we must preserve public education and that if there is a failure of public schools, it is a failure of governance, not of personnel or students, because educating our children is a government responsibility. We must address the issues of public education, rather than giving up

by outsourcing to private schools. The diversion of necessary funding to the private and religious sector through vouchers would undermine the vitality of public education. We would all be better served by using the funds for their intended purpose and making public schools better, stronger and modern.

After all, do we outsource our military when we lose a battle? Do we outsource our judicial system when mistakes happen or we disagree with a verdict? Do we abandon our common infrastructure when it is in need of repair or replacement? No, we dedicate ourselves to fixing the problem and righting the wrong. No system is perfect, but we strive always to improve.

That is not to say that I am opposed to the parental right to choose non-public education for their children. Although I personally believe these children are missing out on a more diverse educational experience, I admit to being okay with a parent's choice to enroll them in private and religious schools, if they pay for it. I am not okay with diverting public money to fund personal choice.

In Ridgewood, we do not receive what is considered to be significant funding from the state or federal government. Still, every dollar we receive is appreciated and necessary to meeting our mission of excellence. Now, under the current proposed federal budget, our funding is in jeopardy. I am concerned that our district, and all public school districts, will suffer if cuts to the Department of Education are made and funds are diverted from public schools to the private and religious school sector.

Noted Teachers College-Columbia University education historian Lawrence Cremin, interpreting Horace Mann, summarized the American ideal as being for students of all socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds – and I add abilities -- to have access to a free, quality public education. Equal access to a free public education affords all students the outlet to develop their own human capital to make themselves marketable in our economic system and to grow into contributing citizens in our society.

I hope you share my passion that we must protect our public schools. If so, I ask you to please contact your Congressman and Senators and voice your concerns.

As always, please feel free to contact me with your questions or concerns.

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