

# OPINION

## ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

# Put parents, not politicians, in charge of school boards

It's August, and Florida is sending its kids back to school, but unfortunately, our schools have become political battlegrounds.

The problem was clearly in evidence at a recent Broward County School Board meeting, during which members chose to spend their time passing 98 political resolutions.

Most parents would surely prefer that schools focus on education, not political ideology.

The problem is that Florida school boards aren't necessarily run by parents. Rather, they are dominated by politicians.

Lack of parental control over Florida public schools is baked into the system because Florida school districts are enormous.

The Broward County School Board has nine members for the county's 1,947,000 residents. Two members are elected at-large and the other seven are supposed to represent 278,000 people each.

To get a sense of how out of whack these representation ratios are, the U.S. state with the median-sized school districts, Colorado, has on average one school



By  
**Stephen  
Erickson**

board member per 4,400 residents.

Huge school board districts are an invitation for the politicization of our schools and their capture by political extremists. Here's why:

First, in a large electoral district, a school board member will be virtually unknown to the vast majority of voters. Extremist candidates can slip under the radar and get elected. Parents won't know until it's too late.

Second, in a large electoral district, significant campaign money must be raised for political election marketing, and that money usually comes from ideological or self-interested sources, including teachers' unions, to whom school board members will be beholden.

Third, the bigger the district, the more likely that the elected official is an ambitious politician, who may have a personal and political agenda at odds with those of parents.

What if we redesigned our school board system so that our local schools were controlled by parents instead of politicians?



The Broward School Board considers superintendent candidates at a recent meeting. **FILE**

Imagine a Parents' Assembly for each of our school districts. Let's say each high school and middle school community annually elected two parents, and each elementary school elected one parent, to this Parents' Assembly.

Importantly, these Parents' Assembly representatives would likely be known within their school communities. They might work on PTAs, coach sports teams, or be seen each morning at the bus stop. They would be known to many other parents personally, and if not, they would be only one or two degrees of separation from every other parent in their local school community. Most often, they would be chosen based on a combi-

nation of their views on education issues and their own personal reputations. Money, political marketing and political ambition would play very little, if any, role.

The members of the Parents' Assembly would, in turn, elect, out of their own body, five or seven school board members, who would serve much as they do now.

Administratively, the system need not change. There would be no need to break up Florida's overly large county-based school districts, a process that could be chaotic and costly, but a broad base of parents — not politicians or a few extremist activists — would be guaranteed control of their local school systems.

Parental control could be taken further. The Parents' Assembly could be empowered to approve school budgets, curriculum changes and/or remove board members. Committees could be formed out of the Parents' Assembly to study subjects ranging from school security, to civics education, to transgenderism.

Parents, who operate in the real world, where common sense is the best practice, will resist the teaching of extremist beliefs to their kids. Critical race theory and gender ideology from the far left, as well as the banning of culturally significant or critically acclaimed literature from the far right, would likely find no place in our schools with parents collectively in control.

While the solution is unusual, its wisdom should be obvious. Parents should oversee Florida's school systems because they will promote the education and well-being of their own children better than anyone.

*Stephen Erickson, of Ponte Vedra, is a Florida parent and the executive director of Citizens Rising, a nonprofit organization dedicated to small electoral districts for all levels of American government.*