

Our View

11-4-49

It's about time for candidates to focus on kids

Running for school board is different than running a school district.

Election campaigns, even school board election campaigns, are all about winning. Their purpose is to convince people to vote for one particular candidate or slate of candidates. There are no compromises, no win-wins. After a contested election, losers go home. They don't get to join the party.

Winning an election is a no-holds-barred proposition. That's why campaigns sometimes get nasty, with candidates or their supporters trading insults and accusations.

The just-ended campaigns for North Allegheny and Avonworth school board seats demonstrated that school board elections are not the apolitical creatures some folks think they should be. Campaigns in both districts opened wounds that must be healed if the school boards are to govern their districts effectively.

Frankly, there are no innocents. All sides in both school districts were guilty of slinging mud. In Avonworth, some of the incumbents who failed to win renomination in the spring primary played the role of sore losers by attempting a write-in campaign this fall. Both sides — supporters of incumbents and supporters of the winning Avonworth Taxpayers Association candidates — accused the other of lying to win votes.

The fight in North Allegheny fractured the district's Republican committee and probably

The fight in North Allegheny fractured the district's Republican committee and probably has widened the gap between two factions on the board. The fall campaign's main issue — whether candidate Lois Schultz should be a school board member while her children are attending a private school — shouldn't have been an issue at all. Meanwhile, Schultz's supporters attacked opponents as busybodies with too much time on their hands.

Divisive campaigns in both districts have caused damage. The winning candidates in both must work hard at rebuilding a consensus. They must be willing to listen respectfully to people who on Tuesday were enemies and who now are constituents.

Before they take office in early December, these school board members-elect must shift out of campaign mode. The work now involves the art of compromise.

The best news in both districts is that the many people involved in school board elections are passionate about educating children. Now that the election is over, educating children is the primary task of every school board member.