

Stevens seeks state education board seat

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Retired educator focuses on early education.

More teaching and less testing.

That's what Robin Stevens of Gothenburg has on his mind as he runs for a seat on the Nebraska State School Board, representing District 7.

The district, which encompasses most of the western half of the state, is now represented by Molly O'Holleran of North Platte who seeks re-election for another four years.

Stevens retired as superintendent of the Schuyler school district last year and wants to dedicate his time to ensuring a top-notch educational system statewide.

"I want to emphasize early childhood education rather than rating and ranking schools," he said. "We're spending millions to develop and update school standards."

Although there are several good state and national programs that deal with early education, Stevens said there needs to be more coordination and consistency.

Research shows that the ability to get a good education is linked to socioeconomic conditions, he said.

Stevens wants to identify and concentrate on at-risk kids in the 0 to 3 age range because that's when the biggest gains can be made.

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He pointed to a preschool program in Schuyler where children are identified and visited by two full-time school employees who support both the child and the child's parents.

"This is really bigger than education, it's life," he said.

In fact, Stevens said the return on the investment of supporting children at an early age is dramatic when one thinks of the societal problems that could be reduced.

"Would you rather add weight to society or have a kite that uplifts it?" he asked. "Put money where it does the most good."

Stevens said curriculum and accountability and the money needed to support schools are important but shouldn't overshadow the importance of early childhood education.

"Let's get on with a solution that's consistent, constant and sustainable in every Nebraska school and make Nebraska a model for the nation," he said.

While superintendent at Schuyler, Stevens said he expanded early childhood programs, increased educational efficiency and effectiveness in growing a district communication, administered a multi-million dollar budget, facilitated passage of a bond issue for a new grade school and encouraged involvement in a culturally diverse community.

A Eustis native, Stevens has taught and coached at schools in Iowa and Nebraska (including Gothenburg for 12 years), was an assistant principal at North Platte High School and principal at Cozad High School.

He and Lynette Stevens, a retired teacher, have two children and three grandchildren.

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