

FORWARD THINKING

Think about Milton students on Nov. 5

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For Forward Janesville, Inc.

Pride means to be proud of oneself, often derived from your personal achievements or the achievements of those closely related to you. It's a sense of belonging and love for the community.

When I was in high school from 2015-2019 in Milton, pride was all around. Often-times, the schools were a point of pride for the community.

I was proud to be a student at Milton High School. We had great teachers who I felt extremely supported by. I felt challenged inside and outside of the classroom, which helped me succeed in my future studies at UW-Madison. Lastly, I found countless involvement opportunities to keep me busy all year long, like Show Choir, Student Council, Track, Tennis, and Link Crew.

My favorite thing about being a leader in these organizations was how much my community cheered me on through special moments. I can clearly remember receiving a letter from a community member after being in the newspaper, congratulating me on my track accomplishments.

Although I hold many fond memories, I also remember how challenging my senior year was. Milton had one failed referendum in 2017 and was trying to pass a second one in April 2019. In the Fall of my senior year (2018), I was on the tennis team. Before every practice, we had to sweep the courts because the crumbling concrete was a falling hazard. Around the same time, the rubber from our track was being ripped up because the holes and uneven surface were too dangerous. That Spring, our team ran on bare concrete and could not host competitions due to safety concerns.

I was glad when the capital referendum to upgrade learning spaces and fix the sports facilities passed that April, but I wondered why it had taken so long? Why had I felt so supported by my community cheering me on as an athlete but not supported when referendums for obvious needs were difficult to pass?

On Nov. 5, Milton is asking voters to support an operational referendum to ensure teaching staff can provide opportunities like I had to students. The connections I made during my time in school changed my life. My tennis coach helped me with my college application. My track coach taught me life lessons that I still carry with me, like "everything you do is 99% mental." I just had dinner with the person I stood next to during Show Choir.

The school district in my hometown of Janesville is also asking voters to support an operational referendum, in addition to a capital referendum. While I have not toured the Janesville school facilities, I have heard many parallels to my own experiences as a student in a district where inadequate facilities and overcrowding caused challenges for learning.

Students need positive influences like teachers and coaches in their lives. Students need upgraded facilities. Students need to feel a sense of pride and belonging. I know I needed it. When you vote on Nov. 5, think about the students and what the schools mean for our communities.

Forward Thinking is a ongoing series of columns on local issues, submitted by Forward Janesville, Inc. Katie Chesebro is a lifelong Janesville resident and 2019 graduate of Milton High School. Katie attended UW-Madison for college but returned to Janesville to build her life and career.