To Whom It May Concern:

On April 7th, Caledonia (and Sturtevant) voters will each be asked a non-binding question: “Do you support the creation of an independent school district?” Residents will take the first step of many to come in determining what kind of future we will have. It is a process nearly a decade long, and has benefited from careful consideration and even an early study showing its feasibility. I believe this is something we need to do, and I urge my fellow residents to vote “yes” on Tuesday.

I am motivated by countless stories you and I have surely heard. One of which were Daniel and Kelly, two residents who moved to Caledonia in 2008 with their two-year-old son. Their realtor told them of a movement to create a new school district. But it never happened. In the following years, their son entered an RUSD elementary school, but he was far too distracted with simplistic work, became excitable and needed a more engaging environment. His wonderful teachers could not do much for him because the system didn’t allow them to.

In 2014, this family was able to use expanded Choice to send their son to a private school on the other side of the county where he could get a customized teaching plan at a smaller school, and socially integrate. They continue to hope for an independent district in their village that isn’t half an hour away and anticipate bringing their son back to a local school they can call their own.

Some have presented concerns about cost and practicality – but that is not what April 7th is about. Voters will be simply asked, “do you support the pursuit of a Caledonia School District?” The results are advisory and non-binding, but will inform our village board if residents support an updated feasibility study on the subject. Without a “yes” vote, we will never know the precise financial impact of such a project, left only to educated guesses. An independent district would be impossible.

However, a study was first conducted in 2009 by WISTAX, a Madison-based research organization, and paid for by the village. It showed promising numbers for our own district. Caledonia already hosts four school campuses and one large vacant lot. According to state law, Caledonia would receive the buildings and land in an equal separation through arbitration, and we would have well over two years to lay the groundwork for a district, complete with teachers, classes, after-school programs and administration. Upon creation of a district, a new, locally accountable school board would be elected.

Under the old law, the 2009 study indicated that Caledonia would have a slight bump in property taxes (approx. $12/mo on an avg. home) for the first three years as we built a high school. But this estimation was based on an old formula where Caledonia received no state aid for two school years. This was changed several years ago. Now, both Caledonia and Racine Unified would even receive an additional 5% bump in revenue from the first day of school, plus locally collected monies. The smaller, more easily managed Racine district would actually receive MORE funding, according to a district official. Combined with Act 10 reforms and lower construction costs, most factors in the old study have likely improved to our favor.

Caledonia joined RUSD when it was a rural town, but we are now larger than Cudahy, South Milwaukee, Muskego, Greendale, Union Grove and other nearby communities that all have their own districts and are run very well. Stories like Daniel and Kelly are everywhere, and despite new families, Caledonia’s population has not grown in nearly 15 years. We are losing parents, and their children every year because of a problem we can solve. Over 3,000 students have already left in the last year through open enrollment or choice, thousands more through private, home school or other alternatives.

We became a village almost 10 years ago – we have our own police, fire, highway department and utility district. It is time for Caledonia to begin the steady process toward it’s own education as well.

Please make sure you vote on Tuesday, April 7th, and tell your family and neighbors to do the same. History is about to be made, and our children and future residents will consider this body of voters as the ones brave enough to make the call to move forward.

Ed Willing

Caledonia parent, CCSD board member, Village Trustee