

A COMMUNITY WHERE WE CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER - WE PULLED TOGETHER AFTER A STORM WILL WE DO THE SAME FOR OUR SCHOOLS?

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Around 4:30 on Saturday afternoon, at the height of Charlotte's sudden storm, a 70-foot-tall pine tree lost its moorings in the earth and toppled onto our Plaza-Midwood front yard. Crouched at the center of our house, our ears brimming with the roar of wind and rain, my 6-year-old and I did not even hear it fall. Not until the storm subsided, and we crept out, did we see the massive trunk across the drive, and the branches that filled the yard.

Once the rain was done, people began to drift by. Some simply motored past, talking on cell phones as they gazed through the rolled-up glass of car windows. Others paused to ask if we were all right. Still others listened politely as we said we didn't need help, then went to get their work gloves and began to cut and haul. The man who takes care of our trees arrived with his chainsaw.

By the time the light began to fade, the drive was clear, the garden had been resurrected, and we felt the warm glow that comes with living in a community where people care about each other. We were almost glad the tree had fallen.

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The question of bonds

Having a 70-foot-pine land in your yard, just a few feet from your house, tends to take your mind off other things.

Before the storm blew up, I had planned to spend Saturday afternoon writing county commissioners about the upcoming school bond decision. The fallen tree pushed the bonds to the back of my mind. But it also underscored their importance.

The citizens of Mecklenburg County face the question of whether we are going to live in a community where people look out for each other, and focus on ways to meet the needs of all the county's residents. The school bonds embody that question.

Sadly, the bond debates of recent years have pushed in the opposite direction. Rather than inspiring county residents to put on their work gloves and tackle the school system's real needs, too many so-called leaders have argued that the community can only afford to meet a small portion of that need.

As a result, the needs of some communities have been pitted against those of others, creating divisive and unproductive anger, rather than purposeful unity. It has weakened the school system, and the county as a whole.

The people who gathered in our yard on Saturday afternoon put aside other plans because their neighbors needed their help. These connections strengthen our neighborhood, and each of its residents as well.

Public schools, of course, are far more important than driveways or azaleas. By pitching in together to ensure that all of Mecklenburg county's schooling needs are met, we will strengthen our community immeasurably.

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Connection or division?

The \$620 million bond requested by the school board, which covers a range of upgrades and new

construction, would be a step in that direction. A smaller bond, especially one weighted toward only one kind of need, would perpetuate division.

I urge the county commissioners to approve the full \$620 million bond request, and then to spend the coming months helping voters understand why approving that request would be a crucial step forward for our whole community.

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Pamela Grundy is the parent of a rising first grader at Shamrock Gardens Elementary, and on the steering committee of **Mecklenburg ACTS** .