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PREV

Abdul-Mbacke files to run for Henry County school board

By Holly Kozelsky Jun 24, 2017 3 min to read

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Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke
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MARTINSVILLE - Being the only school board candidate with children in county schools, Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke feels she has an understanding of the issues as well as a real stake in the system.

Abdul-Mbacke filed this week to run for the Iriswood District seat on the Henry County Board of Education, a position currently held by Curtis Millner. Former Laurel Park principal Ben Gravely has also filed to run for the seat.

"I'm coming in completely as a parent trying to advocate for both the parents and the students, putting students first," Mbacke, a physician, said. She has three sons, one in high school, one in elementary and one in preschool.

She said that being a parent of students is "very vital. If I didn't have kids in the

schools, I wouldn't know that Mt. Olivet's first grade didn't take a field trip last year," apart from a visit to Magna Vista High School. Also, a neighbor's child was given the chance at only one field trip last year – to a local company which paid all the costs of the trip.

"How can we be raising global citizens when we can't even get them to go to Greensboro?" she said. "People on the board" who don't have children "can take a cut on field trip expenditures and it's not real to them."

If she were on the board, "I would hear about these decisions at home and be held accountable" by her children, she said. "Obviously I want the teachers and administrators to be happy, but at the end of the day our constituents are the students."

An idea she said she would like to develop is to create more opportunities for vocational education, including skilled trades and technical training.

Four-year colleges aren't for everyone, Mbacke said, so she also feels the schools should institute more vocational programs.

Last year, the hospital contracted out of state for many surgical technicians because there weren't enough qualified people locally to do the job, she said.

"This is a one- to two-year training program that we could incorporate into the high schools and work collaboratively with Patrick Henry Community College to develop," Mbacke said. Having a program for that field would "place (graduates) into jobs paying \$40,000 to \$60,000 without doing the four-year degree."

Not only would having technical programs benefit the students individually but also the community as a whole, because young people would be able to stay in the area to work in fields for which they've prepared instead of leaving.

Mbacke is also the founder of Prevention vs. Punishment, a community activism group to reduce expulsion and suspension rates in local schools.

She started that effort after hearing her son, a student at Magna Vista High School, talk about how common suspension was as punishment. She looked into studies and statistics on the matter and found that it was a common response, even for non-violent matters such as talking too much or using a phone in class. Those issues "are not reasons to prevent an education," she said.

Prevention vs. Punishment has been looking at alternative methods to help keep order in the classroom while still ensuring that offending students continue learning.

Organizing and promoting that effort is how she became involved with the schools, she said.

"A lot of things they are doing right," but having had lived in different areas, "I can see things for improvement that people here have gotten used to," she said.

Mbacke said she grew up in a modest, single-parent household in Harlem, New York, where she learned the importance of education early on. Watching her mother work multiple jobs with only a high school diploma showed her that education could be used as a tool for mobility to opportunities not common where she grew up.

She now owns Piedmont Preferred Women's Healthcare in Ridgeway. She says she has delivered more than a thousand babies in the Martinsville/Henry County area.

Mbacke was appointed by Governor McAuliffe to the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History in 2015, is an active member of Virginia Organizing and a member of The Galilean House of Worship Scholarship Committee, which awards money for college to local students.

“Over the years because of my occupation and friendships with parents in the community I feel I have gotten to know what's important for kids and parents, and what is important is that our schools and community prepare our youth for success,” she said.

Holly Kozelsky reports for the Martinsville Bulletin. She can be reached at holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

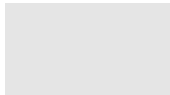
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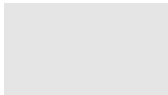


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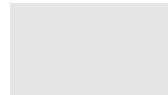
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