



# *Board of Education Column*

*By Seth Holden, Board of Education*

## **Negotiations Update**

In my previous column back in May, I discussed the third and final MOU (Memo of Understanding) that came out of our last negotiated agreement. That MOU required the Fargo Board of Education and the Fargo Education Association to engage in negotiations training. That training has been completed and was facilitated by Joel Friesz, the executive director of the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice.

The training was attended by eight Board members (one Board member was unable to attend due to illness), nine members of the Association, Superintendent Dr. Rupak Gandhi and Friesz. The training consisted of a restorative circle and took place over a Saturday morning in September.

I thought the training was very valuable, even though its focus evolved from negotiations training to trust building. I felt I learned a great deal about my fellow Board members and the people who will be sitting at the negotiating table with us. It also generated some thoughts and ideas that could be utilized by the Board and the Association to assist in successful negotiations for years to come.

It is my hope as Chair of the Board's Negotiations Committee that the Board and the Association can use what we have learned from the MOU's to lay the blocks of a bridge that brings the Board and the Association closer together. I hope that our negotiations become celebrated opportunities to problem solve for our district and are free of mistrust and misunderstanding. Please note that I must credit Grant Kraft for the "blocks of a bridge" analogy. As much as I love crafting a good analogy, I cannot take credit for that one.

As I write this, the Board awaits a petition from the Association. I fully expect us to receive that petition before the end of the year. If that happens, we will begin sitting at the table with the Association for negotiations early next year. As for now, I look forward to working with Administration, my fellow Board members and the Association. Hopefully my next update includes news of new signed negotiated agreement!

