

Kansas Families for Education – School Board Candidates’ Survey Sept 2017

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2. Residence: I have living in Kansas for about 30 years. I moved to Prairie Village, KS in July 1972 and moved away after graduate school in 1987, back again in July 2002 to present.
3. Yes, I attended public education.
4. Yes, my children attend public schools.

5. Top 3 objectives if election to the board:

My priorities for the district are interrelated and begin with the following three goals:

- a renewed focus on student success for all,
- strengthening teacher support for learning, and
- open communication.

Renewed focus on Student Success for All. Creating equitable opportunities for every student to make meaningful progress toward college and career readiness is a primary goal of public education. I will encourage an inclusive and evidence-based decision-making process to prioritize the use of increased K-12 funding from the 2017 state legislature. Districts will see a partial restoration of state aid, with an estimated increase of at least \$14.2 million to Shawnee Mission toward the roughly \$30 million in annual operating budget cuts made since 2009.

One change I would like to see become a more routine board practice is to explicitly communicate how board decisions relate to the district’s strategic plan and top priorities. I believe this practice will serve to strengthen the alignment of district resources with policies and practices focused on student progress and achievement of state education standards.

Teacher Support for Learning. Shawnee Mission students would benefit from a focus on the professional learning environments at our building and district levels. Capacity for our teachers and principals to be responsive to the learning needs of all Shawnee Mission students requires instructional support, particularly for our students with barriers to learning due to poverty, language, disability or cultural diversity.

School districts across Kansas have won a hard-fought opportunity to begin restoring deep cuts imposed on public schools over the past several years. Supports for learning were dramatically reduced, shifting excessive responsibilities for student’s educational progress onto the shoulders of teachers and principals. Shawnee Mission schools lost counselors, aids, librarians, social workers, paraprofessionals. Teachers’ class sizes and course-loads increased, planning time decreased, and all while base salaries

were frozen. Shawnee Mission leadership compounded the impact of the state's financial crises by launching multiple initiatives simultaneously, with insufficient resources to roll out the new programs smoothly. The one-to-one technology is one of these more visible initiatives.

The district has taken some recent steps to rebuild teacher support for learning. These steps include the infusion of instructional coaches, professional learning communities and adopting reasonable parameters on the workday of our elementary teacher specialists. I will continue to advocate for the state to fund the actual costs of providing all students with the opportunities to be college and career ready. I will prioritize continued exploration of ways to optimize existing resources for the support of teaching and learning in our classrooms.

Open Communication and Transparency. I will prioritize board procedures and district practices directed at improving communication with parents, the Shawnee Mission community as well as within the district. One change I will bring to board meetings is my tendency to ask questions and an expectation for more public discussion among board members. I will encourage the use of protocols that demonstrate active listening, respect and responsiveness to concerns raised in open forum. I will work to restore district advisory-type councils, to create interactive opportunities among district stakeholders for information exchange. Based on 15 years of meeting with parents and teachers, advisories of interest are likely to begin with diversity and equity, inclusion, budget, and communication.

6. Respective roles of the following in development and selection of classroom curricula, textbooks and materials?

Superintendent – is primarily responsible for selecting and recommending district curricula, textbooks and some of the supporting materials (e.g., kits for science). The curricula should be selected in alignment with the state and district education standards. One would expect that all necessary materials would be provided by the district, but teachers and parents commonly supplement the cost of classroom instructional materials.

School Board – is primarily responsible for setting the selection criteria and vetting the district curricula recommendations in alignment with the selection criteria (e.g., state and district education standards, district's strategic plan, community goals and priorities). The school board is ultimately responsible for the final curricula selection.

Teachers – are primarily responsible for implementing the curricula that is selected by the school board and superintendent, as well as developing or finding supplemental materials to augment the district curricula. Teachers are responsible for developing daily lesson plans, individualizing instruction, monitoring and assessing students daily progress. Teachers often supplement district curricula materials.

Parents – role in the development and selection of classroom curricula varies from district to district, ranging from no explicit role, to individualized input at the classroom level, to participation on curricula review committees.

7. Do you support biblical creationism or ID design as an alternative to evolution?

No, I do not. Neither creationism nor intelligence design is a science. I support the teaching of scientific theory and concepts in science courses, such as evolution.

8. Do you support research-based science instruction?

Yes, I support research-based science instruction including biology, chemistry, physics, environmental science and such. I have taught research methods to graduate students in the Schools of Education at KU and UMKC for over a decade. Our students must learn how to be critical consumers of information and to be able to judge the rigor and credibility of research and scientific concepts.

9. Do you support comprehensive or abstinence-only sex education?

I support more comprehensive sex education curricula, using a parental opt-out policy. Comprehensive approaches typically teach about abstinence as the best method for avoiding STDs and unintended pregnancy, but also teaches about condoms and contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and of infection with STDs, including HIV. It also teaches interpersonal and communication skills. Access to the instructional materials should be developmentally appropriate and made available to all parents and guardians for review, in a timely fashion.

10. Do you support opt-in or opt-out? Why?

I support an opt-out approach for sex education. Opt-in policies run the risk of being exclusionary for youth whose health and well-being may be dependent upon the information. Reasons for failing to opt-in could have nothing to do with parental concerns about their children being instructed about sexual health, including may simple logistical oversights. An opt-out policy should also be careful to offer the student and their family a non-stigmatizing way to opt-out so that the student doesn't feel singled out.

11. Do you support the constitutional provision for separation of church and state? Explain.

I support the constitutional provision for the separation of church and state. Two of the more frequent circumstances under which these boundaries are challenged include efforts: a) to require instruction on intelligent design and creationism in science courses, and b) to implement the use of vouchers or tax credit scholarship programs to redirect public dollars for private school tuition.

If a public school offered a comparative religious course, the curriculum might include the concepts of creationism and intelligent design. These faith concepts, however, are not science. The 2014 Kansas legislature adopted a voucher-type tax credit scholarship program, through manipulation of legislative process. Since this time, pro-public education advocates have been attempting to repeal and/or reduce the scope of this program. My opposition stems from the discriminatory admission and expulsion practices that are utilized by non-public schools, which creates a system of choice for schools, not parents. Most non-public schools, for example, do not provide special education services. In addition, these voucher-type programs allow for the application of public funds for religious instruction, they can operate with public funds under

different rules of accountability: foregoing accreditation, opting out of participation in or reporting of students' state assessments scores, and choosing not to disclose financial records.

12. Views of the role of religion in public schools (prayer, instruction, holiday observations)?

As noted previously, a public school might offer a comparative world religions course within the department of history. This instructional approach examines religion from an informational perspective rather than one of indoctrination. However, using public dollars to pay for parochial tuition runs afoul of the Establishment Clause. Other forms of religious expression in public schools, like school-led or school-sponsored prayer, was ruled unconstitutional in 1962 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

13. Definition of suitable or adequate education?

My definition of suitable/adequate education is the actual cost of providing every Kansas youth equitable opportunity to make significant progress toward and achieve the state education performance standards, as defined by State Board of Education and Kansas Department of Education. I worked with Rep. Rooker and Dr. Bruce Baker to amend the new school finance formula. We drafted the cost function analysis, which was successfully amended to the performance audits, to operationalize the level of adequacy based on actual costs of a defined set of education performance outcome standards (SB 19, New Sec. 45, e).

14. How do I feel about the SB 19? Appropriate? Too much? Why?

The state board of education estimated that the actual costs of an adequate K-12 public education would require the Kansas legislature to increase state aid for public education by \$893 million annually. This estimate was based in large part, on the 2006 cost study conducted by the non-partisan Kansas research division of Legislative Post Audit which included a cost function analysis. The 2017 Kansas legislature restored only about a third of the estimated costs. Many Kansans are awaiting the state Supreme Court's ruling on the Gannon adequacy case. I am hopeful the Court will rule that the state funding levels are inadequate and force the legislature to continue work on revenue streams. The cost function analysis embedded in the new formula will provide the Kansas legislature with an evidenced-based study upon which to make more informed decisions. The debate may change from an argument about how much money is enough, to one about how many educational outcomes standards are we willing fund adequately.

15. Do you support tax credits, vouchers?

As mentioned previously, I do NOT support the use of vouchers or voucher-like programs, such as the tax credit scholarships, to divert public funds for private/parochial tuition. Any K-12 education program that receives public funds should be held to the same rules and

accountability standards as the traditional public schools – enrolling all students regardless of special needs (disability, language, poverty) or arbitrary selection criteria, sharing financials records and student test scores on state assessments, and accounting for students who have dropped out or been pushed out in outcome measures like graduation and dropout rates. I would support both a repeal of the tax credit scholarship program or an amendment to change the tax credit to a tax deduction.

16. Discrimination?

Yes, I support proposals prohibiting schools from discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.

17. Teacher retention and recruitment?

High quality teaching is a critical element of academic excellence. The retention and recruitment of effective teachers, and principals, is a common characteristic of high performing schools. Educational research consistently points to two factors that influence this characteristic: working conditions and competitive compensation. A sharp increase in concern over both factors has been voiced by our educators for several years now.

The Shawnee Mission National Education Association noted that top concerns for district teachers include: increased class sizes and teaching loads, lack of building level support staff, reduced plan time, and limited support for student with special learning needs. And while Shawnee Mission offers one of the more competitive salary schedules, our teachers' base salary had been frozen for more than five years and workload remains higher than most area districts.

These circumstances stem largely from a state tax policy that imposed severe state budget constraints, following the budget shortfalls of recession. In conjunction with these severe cuts to our schools operational budgets, the former superintendent and school board supported the adoption of multiple instructional initiatives. Morale was negatively impacted as much by the financial loss for adequate instructional supports as by a lack of overt respect for the challenges our building personnel experienced during our state's budget crises. Educators are more likely to remain in the profession if provided reasonable conditions to meet the learning needs of their students.

I have fought for years to restore adequate state funding for public education. Now with 2017 partial restoration, I support the negotiated SMSD agreement to unfreeze base salaries of teachers and to return the working conditions of our elementary specialists to a reasonable load. I will work with district leadership to solicit the input of personal and to draw upon educational research to identify the promising ways to improve teacher supports for learning. Strategies may include directing more professional development support for Engage New York,

strategies for teaching with cultural competence, mentoring support for novice teachers or restoring the supervisory/collaborative period for high school teachers.

One other important tool to address recruitment and retention is regular communication between the school board, superintendent and the district's legislative delegation. College students will be less inclined to enter the teaching profession, if lawmakers are allowed to pass one destructive bill after another without a challenge from local education leaders. Kansas public school districts must speak out and maintain working relationships with elected officials in order to prevent a repeat of the 2012 to 2016 legislative sessions.

18. State education standards?

Kansas is currently in the process of the statutory requirement to review and revise the state education standards every seven years. The Kansas mathematics and English language arts standards are derived from the Common Core State Standards and adopted by the Kansas Board of Education in 2010. Representatives of the Kansas Department of Education were active participants among nationally represented team members that developed the mathematics standards for the Common Core. Our science standards are an adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards in 2012 and up next for state review.

I support the state's review and revision process, which typically takes at least a full year and involves stakeholders from across the education spectrum. From what I have read, the revised Kansas English language arts and mathematics standards are not deviating much from the primary goals of the Common Core. The revised standards continue to focus on conceptual understanding and real-world applications, with priority given the depth of knowledge rather than breadth of familiarity. I support these changes over No Child Left Behind. The addition of social emotional standards only enhances the K-12 educational priorities beyond math and reading to the development of the whole child.

Just a few short years ago, some members of the Kansas legislature joined in a national effort to ban schools districts from implementing anything related to the Common Core. Here are two links to a couple of the documents I prepared on behalf of the Kansas PTA, to help parents make more informed decisions about the issue:

- Issue Brief - http://kansas-pta-legislative.org/sites/default/files/IssueBriefCCSS_KSCCRS.pdf
- Myth Busters - <http://kansas-pta-legislative.org/?q=content/myth-busters-%E2%80%93-common-core-state-standards-%E2%80%93-reality-prohibition-%E2%80%93-september-2013-issue-7>.

I personally share the opinions of this testimony.

19. Which of the following should be used to finance public education?

State revenues? YES, primarily state dollars to fund progress toward and achievement of the state education standards

Local revenues? Some, to fund programs and services beyond or separate from the state education standards – often programs specifically relevant to the local population.

Federal revenue? Yes, primarily to contribute to the additional costs of provided equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities, and those living in poverty or English language learners.

20. Local option budget?

No, not likely in the near future. I prefer to see the state continue to restore financial aid for public education, rather than shift anymore of the burden of this constitutional obligation onto local tax payers.

21. Right to have patrons' questions answered at board meeting?

I will encourage the use of board protocols that demonstrate active listening, respect and responsiveness to concerns raised in open forum. For example, I would like to see a few moments taken by the cabinet members in the room to locate relevant information on the district website and display those pages on the projection screens in the board room. This way concerned speakers can be directed initially to related information and key district personnel with whom they should follow up. Another strategy to consider is the restoration of advisory councils/committees. Concerned citizens could then be direct to a dedicated group of patrons working to resolve the shared problems. I will strive to find balance, because it could be just a problematic to commit to answering every question asked in open forum. The risk is losing control over the board meeting agenda and critical time needed to make important decisions for the school district, is real.

Additional Information – please see attached summary vitae.