

THE DPS CHALKBOARD
SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
FEBRUARY 2023

While oversight of the Superintendent is one of your primary roles, past boards have micromanaged our Superintendent, even having them report on every meeting attended, daily schedule, etc. How do you perceive your role of managing the most important employee of District 61?

- I believe the board should know every action the superintendent takes.
- I want to know what our superintendent does on a day-to-day basis, and report to the public for transparency.
- Strategic objectives then accountability for those objectives is all that is necessary.

Other: The Board has one employee and as such should establish a collaborative working relationship with the Superintendent. The Board should set strategic direction and goals, focus on student achievement and associated curriculum, monitor district climate and culture, ensure a safe education setting for students, faculty, staff and community, engage the community, ensure fiscal accountability and evaluate district/superintendent results. In summary, the Board reviews Superintendent recommendations and sets policy while the Superintendent and staff operationalizes policy. High performing Boards should work as a team to maintain this critical governance relationship. Functional high performing Boards instill confidence throughout the organization and community; to that end, it is imperative that we as the Decatur Board of Education do BETTER!

Nearly a third of district funding comes from the state of Illinois - based on the number of students in the district, and with a declining enrollment that revenue will likely be drastically reduced. Another large block of funding comes from the city, which also has a generally declining population. And this is occurring in a time of large inflation where costs continue to increase dramatically. When the CARES money funding cliff arrives in January of 2024, our district, along with many districts around the country, will face major funding issues. While this problem will fall squarely with the Sup and the District CFO, your job as a board member will be to make sure that we are prepared to face this issue and to make sure it's dealt with. Are you prepared to oversee this challenge, and what will you be looking for in future budget proposals?

- This isn't the job of a Board Member – it's the job of the CFO. ○ I'm not concerned about this. We have been fine financially, and we should continue to make it work.
- I'm concerned and willing to explore: ○ School Closures ○ Outsourcing IT, Maintenance, etc.
- Reducing District Administration

Other: I am the only candidate who has addressed the question from a policy, performance and implementation perspective. As the district emerges from the COVID related surplus, the Board will be forced to address issues such as declining enrollment, flat to declining community EAV and escalating costs just to highlight a few issues. One should remember that the District is approximately 50 per cent of the local property bill and that is dependent on community stability and/or growth. I have a 34-year track record of willingness to proactively address repositioning the organization and in my estimation all viable options are on the table when addressing such issue of community importance. When faced with this type circumstance, timely information flow as well as a collaborative relationship between the Board, Superintendent and community make for better long-term decision making.

Another huge challenge we have in our district is declining test scores. In many ways solutions to this issue should be reflected in a board member's broad philosophical vision of learning. Which of the following should be funded and/or implemented?

- New school buildings,
- A transition to more homogeneous learning opportunities (including small group instruction) in the elementary schools,
- Consolidating High Schools, ○ Teaching to the test encouraged ○ Teaching to the test discouraged ○ Raise the level of expectations in our schools – across the board.

Other: I would offer the perspective that we are continually trying new curriculum solutions but getting much less than acceptable results. In light of most recent measurable results, I would suggest that we hit the pause button and immediately embark on a path that focuses on K-3/4 reading & math results. The fact that our children who read and complete math functions at less than 5 per cent is unacceptable. This challenge will not be a quick fix but rather a long-term issue. I believe we should be laser focused on this population however we cannot forget the remainder of our K-12 student body since our students are the future work force for Decatur business & industry. Achievement will be enhanced by developing a district culture based on mutual trust and support among teachers, staff, administration and Board. We should employ good teachers, principals and administrators then allow them to be creative and do their job. The Board should expect on-going Superintendent/Board dialog with a result focus. We need to quit pointing the finger and recognize this lack of achievement as an organization and community issue. Blame does not solve problems; a functional performing organization is much more capable of long-term solutions. While this response focused mainly on problems/issues, we should not fail to recognize our nationally recognized FFA program and the Jerry Dawson Leadership Academy as well as many other success stories that come out of District #61.

We're anxious to hear our Superintendents feelings on cell phones in schools, but one could make an argument that the use of cell phones by students in the classroom (during instruction time) falls under the category of the "purpose" of our school system. At the bare minimum, a board backed proposal would go a long way in showing the district leadership team that the community is behind a particular course of action. What are your thoughts on cell phone use in the schools and specifically, if it were to come to a vote, would you vote?

- some type of cell phone ban in classrooms,
- banning cell phones globally?

Other: I would suggest that the Board engage the issue with Superintendent/staff providing leadership for a discussion that involves building level teachers, principals, etc. A thorough review of current District #61 classroom cell phone policy and its enforcement as well as national trends and research should be made part of a community information process. As a note, my initial observation questions the need for cell phones in the class room since students have access to tablets for learning. Our newly appointed Security Administrator should actively weigh in on the Cell phone question. Once the cell phone use issue has been reviewed and discussed, my track record proves that I am able to make the tough decision

Should we allocate more money from the budget (at least while we have CARES money we can use) toward sending staff to job fairs, colleges, etc. to look for qualified teachers? This isn't the role of a board member. The district leadership team is doing fine on this issue. We need to do better. I will work with the Superintendent to increase our efforts in this area.

Other: Attraction and retention should be a regular agenda item in the biweekly board meeting, and/or it will be included in my evaluation of the Superintendent. As we have known for decades, retention is equally important so our staff should follow parallel paths with attraction and retention. This is just a beginning statement. I would suggest that a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan be developed (quickly). The effort should come as a coordinated effort by not only human resources & communications, but also teaching staff, business and other associated divisions. Superintendent should work with Staff to develop this plan and implementation strategies. Once a draft is completed, Superintendent should bring it for Board review and discussion. Once implemented, results should be measured and then reported on a regular basis.

Many of you have mentioned board “transparency” in your public platforms. What exactly do you mean by that? What actions are you for to provide better transparency?

Other: Transparency has become a common term in the world of public administration. In my estimation, there should be a robust on-going public information flow that provides interested parties the opportunity that engages staff and Board in a productive manner. With regard to issues surrounding past “open meetings act” violations, the Board, staff and community need to be assured that we are acutely aware of the Attorney General ruling and will diligently to be certain that we are not putting the District in any similar position. I realize that the Board will have to work hard to restore community trust and confidence. Transparency does not always come through agreement with the handling of every matter but rather the ability to carry on difficult conversations in a productive manner that lead to better community outcomes. Let me reemphasize trust, confidence and respect with strict adherence to Illinois State Statutes!

Other: Another issue of paramount importance in my estimation is safety and security in our schools. Our students, teachers, staff and community deserve a safe secure learning/work environment. I believe it to be common knowledge that students perform better in an environment that where they feel secure. Your recent article on “Violence in our Schools” is an eye opener. In my estimation, this issue should be one of our highest priorities and actionable action and consequences developed in the immediate future. Building level teachers and staff should be directly involved in this process since the have these interactions on a daily basis. Upon developing a clear set on actions and reactions there should be active school level support from Administration and Board.

What other concerns do you have that rise to the level of the issues mentioned above and fall squarely into the Board’s purview. Please be specific.

Please be sure to return your responses via e-mail no later than February 28, 2023. The email address is duanemcc23@comcast.net.

Thank you for your participation!