

2019 St Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire

1. Will you abide by the DFL endorsement? Yes or No answers only

No

2. Please give a brief bio and describe why you are running.

I was originally born in San Francisco, CA. I attended college in 1998 and have been a resident in Minnesota ever since. I have lived in Lowertown for six years and have been a community educator for eight years at both North Hennepin Community College and Century College. After the last Presidential election, I wanted to do more than just discuss the reason why government wasn't working for Americans. As I've been a life long educator whether it's through my career or through activism, I believe that more needs to be done for students and teachers. I also believe that all students need an even playing field as it pertains to education and obtaining their goals/dreams.

3. What do you see as the skills students will need to succeed as community members, in the workforce and in college readiness in the next 10 years? Where are ways in which the District can improve to help all students succeed?

The skills that students will need in the next 10 years will be a combination of Technological (Solar, AI, Robotics, Process Automation, etc.) and Vocational to back fill an industrial workforce that is retiring. I also believe there are some skills that are still in their infancy that students will need as they work in a future workforce. In 10 years, the skills that students need to enter the workforce will be different than they are now; technology will be improved, communication will take on other forms and success will be measured on a different scale. Students that enter the workforce in 10 years, need to be flexible to adapt to change and be eager to constantly learn.

4. Describe three programs and/or policies of St Paul Public Schools that you believe are working/effective.

I believe that for all that St. Paul has going for it, it's Public Schools are being done a big disservice. The programs listed here are not without issue, but I think they represent the best that St. Paul Schools must give to our students.

Discovery Club provides a safe environment for kids to learn and develop before and after school as well as on non-school days, but again more needs to be done as sites do fill up quickly. The second program that I feel is effective is the free summer meal program that SPPS is providing from June 11th through August 23rd. There are so many food insecure households in St. Paul, while a summer vacation might be a blessing it is also a highly anxiety laden time for students who don't know where their next meal will come from. Having a full stomach with nutritious food can be the difference between a student staying engaged and falling behind. Lastly, I feel that Neighbor Day is a strong way to bring lots of people together to celebrate community or various programs and our students. I would like to see this type of day expand to more events throughout our school year.

2019 St Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire

5. Describe three programs and/or policies of St Paul Public Schools that you believe need to be improved.

I believe these three programs/policies need to be improved upon for our students and our teachers. We need to Close the Achievement Gap, improve relationships for Special Needs Students as well as for Teachers and finally, we need to improve Post – Secondary Readiness.

One of the first things we need to tackle is the Relationships that exist for Special Needs Students as well as the Teachers that serve St. Paul School Districts. Special Needs Students need to be treated as capable students as we would any other student because these students can accomplish whatever they set out to do. This relationship is in jeopardy because we aren't prioritizing education to students in a fair and equitable manner. In uplifting our students, we also need to uplift our teachers so they feel supported as well as allowing them a collaborative space to work with the students that they know in a unique way, a way that no lesson plan could. Teachers should be able to be creative in setting up lesson plans that invite imagination and creativity.

As it relates to Closing the Achievement Gap the disparity between children of color has continued to grow in a very polarized way. We need to work on closing this gap so all students are able to achieve an education that will lead them into the workforce or ready to tackle a Post-Secondary degree. This leads directly into Improving Post-Secondary Readiness, if our students aren't ready to tackle the expectations that a Post-Secondary program will require of them we have failed our students. Giving students the ability to build the skills they will need in a Post-Secondary environment will be key for a future workforce that will work in technology or collaborative units to solve problems. Improving relationships for Special Needs Students and for Teachers

6. Describe the strengths you see in the Special Education program and what improvements you believe are needed. Please include a discussion of mainstreaming in your response.

While this program is a useful tool for those students that need assistance or fall under the prescribed conditions in the School District, this program does need improvement. Improvements to this program would include fostering better relationships with the students and their surrounding environment as well as expanding the program for those students that may exhibit signs but don't test on the scale as needing services. I would like to see this program develop into a mentorship program for students across St. Paul Schools to foster better community involvement and provide more candid discussion about the issues facing our kids.

2019 St Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire

7. Describe the strengths you see in the English Language Learners (ELL) program and what improvements you believe are needed. Please include a discussion of mainstreaming in your response.

In St. Paul Public Schools there are over 14,000 students enrolled as English Language Learners (ELL). The strength of this program lies in providing students with English proficiency to help build a strong foundation in other academic areas. ELL programs have increased over 240% over the last 20 years as has the diversity of the program. Areas for improvement are in the way that encouragement is made for students to be successful contributors in the community. I'm a firm believer that the impact is greater if there is more than one person involved – to that end, I think a mentorship program or buddy system should be created to take the additional step needed to encourage students to continue to further themselves in society. ELL students are a considerable segment of the population and their addition to our society and their actions help contribute to our growing and vibrant city. We need to ensure that we are educating the student in the classroom but also preparing for what awaits them outside of school grounds.

8. How can the St Paul Public Schools create and maintain a positive school climate/culture where all students and employees can thrive? Please include a discussion of Restorative Justice practices, School Resource Officers and Implicit Bias in your response.

I am a firm believer that a positive school climate/culture can be achieved for students and teachers by establishing a culture where concerns can be voiced, issues can be approached in a meaningful and sustainable way and the environment must be flexible. If we dig out heels into a side or a resolution, we risk dismissing those we are elected to serve. Big components that make schools what they are, are Teachers, Parent Involvement and Student-Teacher ratio. As it relates to Restorative Justice practices, we need to do a better job of bringing victims and offenders together, so they can hear each other out and attempt to work toward a resolution. Creating a penalty system in schools is almost as bad as our prison systems. Schools are the primary places of interaction and learning and we often are short sighted when it comes to what penalties mean long term. Resource Officers often struggle with being able to get their message out because there is a preconceived notion of the role in a school setting. I would like to see a resource fair at schools where clubs and activities that are available to students are easily accessible, so students, parents and teachers can ask questions and open the conversation. Finally, as it relates to Implicit Bias, I would like to see workshops/trainings for teachers and activities for students across all racial segments of our population to help us understand others. We all need to come at this topic and say, "I have these fears and prejudices and I want to get over them". Currently in this moment, we owe this to ourselves and we owe this to our children; they are our future and education provides the foundation.

9. Describe what you see as a positive working relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

A positive working relationship does not mean we always agree or that we don't hold each other accountable. A positive working relationship takes a lot of work, it requires a lot of listening, being open to new ideas, different ways of thinking and it requires that

2019 St Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire

when we disagree we allow open dialogue to propel the conversation. A positive working relationship will not work if we are quick to anger, jealous or dismiss another's point of view. To that end, there may be times when we disagree, and that disagreement can have each side very far apart from each other. It is in these times that we need to remember what drives us to do this work, what is the goal and what compromises can we make to get to some agreement. I also believe that the superintendent and the school board members need to be seen by the St. Paul School community on a regular basis to open the dialogue on issues that matter to children, teachers, parents and citizens. It's more than transparency, it's about creating a connection.

10. A budget is a moral document that reflects our DFL and community values. What values do you believe our St Paul Public School budget should reflect and how would you exercise fiduciary responsibility of the St Paul Public Schools budget to ensure that the budget we envision is realized? Please include your proposals for exercising review of capital budget project bidding and contract process especially as it relates to current sizable overruns.

There are a few key values that I think should be reflected in the budget; students, teachers, programs and parent involvement. If you've ever come from poverty, you know you watch your pennies and expenditures like nobody's business – so to, do we need to manage the revenue that St. Paul School has as well as the expenditures. While costs continue to rise, and budget overruns seem to be common place, we need to become a fiscally responsible and proactive Public-School community instead of one that is reactive or operating in debt. We need to establish St. Paul Public Schools as a place where students and parents want to come for a world class education. For every capital budget project, we need to ensure that we have a fiscally responsible plan for implementation as well as phasing the project into our Public-School Community. As it relates to Contract processes, we need to be mindful of our responsibility to our students, parents, teachers and concerned citizens and be ready to make very hard decisions to ensure that we set up the Public-School system to work for all students.

Completed questionnaires must be emailed to BethCommers@gmail.com by 5 pm on Friday, June 14. Questionnaires will be put on the St Paul DFL website by Sunday, June 16 and will be made available to city convention delegates.

Also, please consider recording a 1-2 minute video clip that we will put on our FB page and link to on our website? You can post to our FB page yourself or email a link in a google drive to bethcommers@gmail.com Have fun with this!

Completed questionnaires will not be translated into additional languages. Hmong and Somali interpreters will be at the convention. You should feel free to connect with them for assistance in communicating with delegates. Delegates who need interpretation will be wearing headsets that link directly to their particular interpreter.