

2019 St Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire—Chauntyll Allen

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.*

Born and raised in the Rondo community, I attended SPPS, am a proud graduate of Central High School, and am currently in my final year at Metropolitan State University minoring/majoring in African American Studies and Psychology. Over the past 25 years I have worked in various capacities as an advocate and organizer, including 10 years at Hennepin County in a high-crisis facility for child protection, a community leader for Black Lives Matter and an educational assistant and basketball coach in St. Paul Public Schools. I have worked in a variety of schools as a Paraprofessional including Central High School, JJ Hill Elementary, Ramsey Middle School, Como High School, Randolph Heights Elementary and numerous others in my capacity as a coordinator through the Community Education program. The breadth of my hands-on experience across the District has provided me insights into the needs of different groups of students, paraprofessionals and teachers, including youth who've experienced trauma. I have on-the-ground exposure to what works and, importantly, what doesn't work.

I'm running to bring a "Building a school to success pipeline" approach to our District. This is designed to address Minnesota's racial disparities - bridging the achievement gap that persists in our schools and providing an environment that supports all learners. The four elements are:

- Create safe environments for students where they can learn in trauma-free settings and that incorporate restorative practices
- Expand community full-service schools to provide wrap-around services such as healthcare, clothing, hygiene facilities, short-term beds, food, and other social services.
- Increase employment opportunities for graduates by bringing trades back into curriculum offerings.
- Enhance culturally specific curricula and schools

As a Black woman who has dedicated her adult life to supporting youth, this platform is foundational to my beliefs and reasons for running for school board. I will bring all of my connections, relationship building skills, willingness to speak truth to power, and love for all kids to achieving these goals.

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?*

Success for students in the next 10 years will come from broadening the options that are offered for their working lives, enabling them to earn a living wage and be a productive member of their community. This includes encouraging students to find the right fit for themselves and providing them the skills to achieve their goals. This may include introducing skills needed to work in work union positions such as electrical engineering,

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plumbing, carpentry, and other building trades. It may be to prepare them for work in increasingly sophisticated manufacturing jobs. Or, it may be targeted on IT coding and other new industry jobs. Also, students should be educated in the skills needed to be a small business entrepreneur; for example, how to set up a new business, manage finances, build a non-profit, and other tasks of establishing and running your own business. For students who prefer college, their readiness will be enhanced by providing more engaging curricula which increase literacy skills and boost ACT scores.

In addition to teaching the needed and most relevant skills, the District needs to provide an environment in which all kids can thrive. This requires trauma-free schools that protect students from bullying and honor their individual backgrounds and experiences as well as wrap-around community services to provide for their full range of needs. These are all elements of my platform in running for the Board of Education.

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

The strategic plan has the necessary elements in it. If we deliver on it, it'll be beautiful. It's the job of Board to make sure the District follows this plan. There have been some successes so far which have provided starting points to build on:

- a. **History Day:** This program, which is held in 7th and 11th grades, engages students in a statewide competition to create their own history projects. It is effective because its flexibility provides great openness to support students in finding ways that they learn best. Students have options for the vehicle they use: web, poster board, essay, etc. The theme is also general, for example 'Triumph and Tragedy', so that students can select a period of history and focus that particularly interests them. In the process, they learn a range of skills including research, story creation, and presentation. In presenting to their peers, it also allows people to understand each other in the classroom.

Notably, SPPS has done well in this competition. Students rise through the local and state competitions to make it to the national level and SPPS is typically well represented at the national competition in Washington, D. C.

- b. **Athletics:** The sports programming at SPPS has been a strong positive for students. It stands out because of partnership with parks and recreation department, which has helped kids reach state level performance across sports. This is an excellent example of cross-organization partnership leveraging resources. The District can do more in the realm of athletics by participating in more NCAA qualifiers, which provides more visibility for the athletes to get access to the scholarships.
- c. **Recognizing trauma:** Through the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) program, the District has acknowledged the role of trauma as a barrier to learning and has taken important first steps through providing introductory training to staff and introducing trauma specialists. Additional focus is now needed on urban trauma in addition to trauma caused by immigration and other experiences.

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5. *Describe three programs and/or policies of St Paul Public Schools that you believe need to be improved.*
- a. Trades STEPS program: As discussed in #3, broadening access to a full range of career options is needed for all kids. Currently, the STEPS program is targeted to students in Special Ed programs, providing them the chance to have work experiences in partnership with businesses in different jobs; for example, building trades, daycare, and office workers. This approach acknowledges that not all kids should be in college prep and should be broadened to include more partnerships and more students.
 - b. Community Full-Service Schools: There are some efforts to put this in place in the District but they are at the school level and are not widespread. For example, some have organized backpack programs, clothes closets, and other services to help their students. The District should build on this, setting up processes and systems to extend. One option may be a centralized fundraiser to provide support and have resources that can then be made available to schools.
 - c. School safety: The current approach to trying to keep our students safe focuses on lock down drills that cause anxiety and a sense of helplessness. The District needs to explore other options that are focused on survival, using the technology we have available to develop and teach evacuation plans and exit methods in an emergency. We also need to make the schools safer and prevent shooters from entering the schools and classrooms. For example, a doorstopper has been invented that drops down so that door cannot be opened.
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.*

Strengths: The co-teaching model that pairs the main classroom teacher with a Special Education teacher, along with paraprofessional support, is a strong and successful model. It creates an inclusive environment for all students and provides the educational support all students need, both Special Ed and non-Special Ed.

Improvements: Recognizing that not everyone learns in the same way, we need more alternative classroom choices and hands-on learning opportunities. We also need more cultural representation in the Special Education administrative team.

Mainstreaming: It must be acknowledged that initial steps toward mainstreaming were challenging, with insufficient preparation for teachers, students, and families. Special Ed kids had not learned to be in regular classrooms and had not been exposed to actual program material. It is improving and is closer to being managed in ways that satisfy parents of both Special Ed and non-Special Ed students. This progress needs to continue and has been accomplished by the co-taught classroom model described above.

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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.*

Strengths: The visual communication materials used in the ELL program are useful, particularly since they are inclusive to all cultures.

Improvements: The ELL program need to be more aware of trauma and how it shows up in their behavior. Unaddressed trauma is a profound barrier to learning and needs to be acknowledged, especially in this group of students, which is highly likely to have had traumatic experiences in the past.

I would build family engagement by implementing processes that support their transition to new surroundings and cultural norms. I would recommend policies that provide English Learners with access to school and community resources that help them to adapt to their new environment.

Mainstreaming: As students acquire language skills and participate in the regular classroom, we need to be sure that the students and teachers are open to individuals' stories and histories. An environment that welcomes what each culture brings will be positive to the ELL student and enriching for the classroom as a whole.

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.*

We will create and maintain a positive school climate/culture when every student and employee feels equally valid. Within my platform, I plan to implement trauma-free schools so students can feel safe and learn successfully. I will implement adequate training around trauma and how it shows up in the body, including both urban trauma and trauma experienced by new arrivals to our community.

I believe that restorative circles will help build understanding about what students need. However, these need to be funded adequately rather than having funding cut.

We also need to recognize that many SPPS employees are not earning a living wage so we have families, many of whom have children in SPSS schools, living in poverty. Addressing this will improve staff morale as will allowing their voices to be heard on policies and change happening in schools.

In terms of School Resource Officers, they need to receive proper training to really be resource officers. They should identify kids who don't have the resources they need to be successful and work with the city, county, and other agencies to provide services. They need to be experts in identifying available resources and have the relationships in place to connect them to the students and families who need them.

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Regarding implicit bias, this is a pervasive societal phenomenon underpinning the biased behavior that Black students, immigrant students, and other students of color face. We can start to address it in the classroom by respecting individual cultures, and highlighting and embracing diversity. Individuals must be encouraged to have pride in their stories rather than being shamed for them.

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

The School Board has a responsibility to our constituents in ensuring that their voices are uplifted and their needs are addressed. We are responsible for ensuring that the superintendent successfully rolls out the strategic plan. We are also charged with holding the superintendent accountable; for example, if the superintendent is keeping the community out of policy discussions, the board should be inviting them to the table. The most positive working relationship will come when the superintendent is receptive to the feedback the board members bring. That said, I believe in the value of respectful disagreement to achieve a better outcome.

I would support and challenge the Superintendent by fighting for resources, building partnerships, and advocating for the district with the legislature. I would also support by providing feedback on their ideas and channeling other ideas to them so that they can better learn from others. Increased funding for support staff is a priority for me because I've seen the value these roles bring. I'd also focus on increasing community participation around legislation that affect our schools. The courage this takes has been a hallmark of my life as an advocate for youth and I will bring this to my role on the board.

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.*

The values the budget should reflect are in educating our students for success, providing the best learning environments and valuing our teaching staff, administrators, paraprofessionals and all school support staff. The budget should support the upkeep of the District's facilities, communication systems and technology. The budget should have capacity for investing in the future and for immediate issues/concerns and also provide for initiatives which will strengthen the District's commitment to dismantling the achievement gap faced by low income students and students of color.

Speaking directly to the investments in the District's building infrastructure, I was sad and frustrated to learn of what has occurred and what was shared in the initial and subsequent Pioneer Press articles.

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There is no reasonable excuse for overruns in the hundreds of millions when we have schools filled with students who are not prepared to learn because they are hungry, tired, emotionally distressed and not supported.

In both private and non-profit sectors strict project management over construction projects is vital. Without the right planning, oversight and transparency catastrophes such as these will occur.

Buildings and the land they are on should be fully inspected and tested to expose any unforeseen issues that will impact reconstruction projects, for example, lead in the schools' water. Unbiased experts in the field (with extensive experience renovating old school structures) should always be part of the process. Every angle needs to be covered before a scope of work for a project can be determined. This process minimizes the issue of change orders and therefore reduces costs.

After a scope of work is determined it should be presented to the board - or a subcommittee of the board - which can then decide if the work is a priority or even necessary and affordable.

In addition, checks and balances on these projects do not seem to exist or were not followed. There should be a committee created of citizens, school staff and construction experts who receive reports on the progress of each project and can review the budgets, change orders to evaluate the work of each contractor, and address all contracts for contract compliance. This group should be charged with recommending solutions or clearly presenting the status of projects to the board of education and the superintendent.

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.