

## 2019 Saint Paul DFL School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Jessica Kopp

1. No.

2. I am a former middle and high school teacher, parent of a SPPS student entering her 7<sup>th</sup> year in the district, and an education focused community organizer. I'm running to build strong schools in every St. Paul neighborhood in partnership with families, communities, the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, and local non-profits and community organizations. I'm running to build a more responsive, welcoming, and accessible district and board and to be a partner and champion for communities to build the schools their kids need.

3. Beyond basic literacy and math competencies, students will need to be effective communicators, empathetic listeners, critical thinkers, collaborators, possess skills in project and time management, and be able to understand and build connections between systems and communities. As a district we can provide more opportunities for student leadership and student-directed learning experiences both in and out of the classroom by expanding choice in coursework, innovative program design, and through community partnerships with colleges and universities, trade unions, and local organizations.

4. (1) Understanding the importance of building early connections with families, caregivers, and childcare centers, I love the community partnership work happening in the Office of Early Learning. It creates strong, community connected relationships and the opportunity to align best early learning practices in a variety of settings. (2) The Student Engagement and Advisory Board (SEAB) is a fantastic example of elevating and amplifying student voice in a meaningful way; I've seen many of their presentations and have heard their thoughtful questions about policy at school board meetings. I'm eager to see how it can be expanded into our middle and elementary schools. (3) I am deeply impressed with the Govie Leader program at Johnson High School – it's a fantastic example of innovation that builds a strong community of learners and leaders.

5. (1) I'm hearing from current high school families that the HS program hasn't evolved to fully meet the needs of our times and that students are increasingly disinterested and disengaged. High school staff and administration are eager to try something new but are limited by district and state requirements. Our high school programs need an update to make them more culturally and vocationally relevant to more students. (2) I'm concerned about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in our EBD (emotional behavior disorder) programs and am committed to reviewing current assessments used to identify students to screen for ambiguity and bias and adjust where necessary. We also need to look at the practice of placing all our elementary level 3 EBD programs in higher poverty, majority student of color schools and have an honest conversation about why that happens. (3) I think we can do a better job telling the stories of our schools, especially during transition years (kindergarten, middle school, high school) so more families have better information about their options. Our current system makes it easy for families with access and privilege to get into the programs they desire while leaving others at a disadvantage.

6. The strength of our Special Education program is our team of talented, compassionate educators. Several improvements can be made to this program to support students, families, and educators. Schools should be provided with support staffing appropriate to the needs of their students rather than staffing based on numbers only. When considering mainstreaming, it's essential that students are well-supported in the general education classroom and have access to a high-quality learning environment

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outside of the general education classroom (resource room) should their needs on a particular day require it. Relevant, high-quality, ongoing professional development should be available to all educators so they can engage and support students well, and with confidence.

7. I don't have a lot of experience with the ELL program in SPPS but what I do know from my time as a teacher in a different district is that we need a range of options to meet the various needs of students in an ELL program. Co-teaching, student support in the general education classroom, and resource rooms are all possibilities. I have heard from families with students in SPPS ELL programs that they want to see expanded opportunities for students, including increased access to accelerated classes and programs and encouragement and support to register for them.

8. Support ongoing, honest conversations in all learning communities about how we do or do not create welcoming, loving environments for those who learn and work in our schools. Provide professional development opportunities to combat implicit bias, expand restorative justice practices and implement with fidelity, place SROs in buildings only where there is community-wide (students, families, staff) support. And in buildings where there is not community-wide support for SROs, allow flexibility for community to determine what type of staff/solution is a better fit for their needs.

9. I believe every good relationship includes a commitment to open and honest communication and the ability to disagree in a way that doesn't erode trust and goodwill. Ideally the board and the superintendent are working collaboratively in service to the SPPS community.

10. Our SPPS budget should reflect a commitment to rigorous, relevant, and engaging learning opportunities for all students in a welcoming and compassionate learning community. While the cost overruns make it clear that something needs to change, I would need to know more about how the capital budget project bidding and contract process is currently reviewed by the board before describing specific proposals.