2025 Springfield School Board Candidate Survey Responses

Prepared by Springfield MSTA

Written Responses Submitted Directly by the Candidates
Kelly Byrne, Gail Smart, Sarah Hough and Dave Myers.

No Edits, Alterations, Substitutions, or Omissions Were Made to Candidate Responses

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Kelly Byrne (Incumbent)

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

Education: B.S. Business Marketing St Cloud State University; 2003 Kickapoo Graduate. 2003 Class 5 Basketball State Champions. Academic-All State Honors.

Career Summary: Pivot Management and the Say You Can Companies: Local business owner since 2009. Real estate investments and development. Senior Housing, Student Housing, multi-family, single family, Industrial outdoor storage.

Civic Activities. Ozarks Regional YMCA Board of Directors. Current SPS Boardmember. Youth Sports Coach. Former SPS Substitute Teacher (no longer allowed by board policy). Attend Life.Church. Past Disney PTA. Cherokee PTA. Foster failed rescue dog with 4 The Love of K9's (Dude). Financial support for Care To Learn, YMCA, First Priority, Worldserve, Field to Court, Life.Church, Big Brothers.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

I decided to run 4 years ago as a local business owner and SPS parent, who noticed the 15 or so year decline in academic performance in SPS. State assessment scores had declined as compared to prior years as well as compared to the state average consistently over that time. When I looked into the board of education I was surprised there weren't more leaders from the robust Springfield business community serving in that capacity to ensure a healthy and highly functioning district. I was also surprised to see how little discussion there was on issues and how almost every vote was 7-0.

Now, after 3 years of service, I'm seeking my second term. For the first time in about 2 decades we've recorded consecutive years of growth on state assessment scores. We're nowhere near where we need to be, but I'm encouraged that a small positive trend is showing after so many years of decline.

I'm running again because I'm the only SPS parent on the board. I'm running because business leadership is greatly needed on this board at this time. We're in the middle of 4 years of budget reductions and we need to cut $15MM out of the budget over the next two years. We're completing a $220MM bond over the next several years and another bond proposal will be brought forward before that one is finished. Board service is far less about a board member's opinions on how or what to teach students, and mostly about business matters. As a business owner and developer, I start with an idea,

then spend years navigating hurdles in the form of finance, bureaucratic restrictions and approvals, construction, law, engineering, design, and Human Resources, to turn that idea into a place that people will want to spend most of their income on to call home. I cannot think of a better background of experience for school board service. I've learned how to delegate professionals to do their job, and to listen to them, then make decisions based on their advice that will have very real consequences to me, my family, my partners, and my employees, if I don't get it right. 15 years of experience doing this has well-prepared me to listen to educators, attorneys, admins, union representation, and stakeholders, to weigh through the mountains of information and opinions, to arrive at the best decisions for the mission of the district.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

No I have not. I'm currently working on personal endorsements from stakeholders and have around 40 people committed so far, but we are early in the process.
I took part in the United Springfield PAC interview because I will speak with anyone and be open and honest about my positions. That group's stated mission is focused on growing community partnerships. They are very open about their interests in candidates that will create partnerships between SPS and other organizations such as Cox, MSU, OTC, city government, etc... This is what I would consider a "special interest" group. I know many of the people in that group have good intentions, but my priority is not community partnerships. It's to promote the mission of SPS which is, "SPS is committed to the well-being of each student by providing high-quality academic opportunities."

I will not let other interests come before the mission of the district as a boardmember. I suspect one of the primary reasons they did not endorse me was due to my vote against the Alliance for Healthcare, a partnership with Cox and OTC, which they are very proud of. I stand by that vote, and did so in my interview with them, as I saw it as in conflict with the mission of SPS.

That program was proposed to us at a cost of $1,000,000 annually and it was only to benefit 100 students. In a time that we knew we had 4 years of budget reductions which would include laying off staff, I simply could not agree that adding this much expense was the right direction. Our mission is to provide high-quality academic opportunities for "each student", not for a select few. Our focus is not community partnerships unless they help us move the mission forward.

I provide this example as proof that I am focused on the mission of the district and have not and will not let special interests get in the way of what is most important for SPS. Sometimes people get caught up in making a splash, or being the first in the state or country to do something. That's about them and their own ego. We need to do what's best for our district and our students, and it's not always about what we want. It's about what our students need.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

As a member of the board of education the mission and vision of SPS drive my decision making. The Mission of the district is "SPS is committed to the well-being of each student by providing high-quality academic opportunities."

I'm an SPS father, and I've spent time in SPS as a substitute teacher. I have a 15-year career of managing projects, budgets, operations, and employees. These experiences certainly provide a filter for how I approach fulfilling the mission of the district, and in my first term on the board of education I have a consistent track record of questioning, learning, and deciding on issues to promote "high quality academic opportunities for EACH STUDENT."

I value self-assessment, organizational improvement, and forward momentum for optimization. I strive to understand different perspectives and the whole situation prior to decision making. I believe that in my time on the board I have brought a level of accountability, intellectual honesty, and self-awareness to the board of education that hadn't been on display prior to my arrival.

Sunshine law requires us to conduct our business open to the public. For that reason, many current and past board members have been reluctant or flat unwilling to have frank conversations in the board meetings. Due to sunshine law, if it's not happening in the board meetings then it's simply not happening. I'm aware that sometimes my questions or comments appear direct or harsh, and that can be unnerving to people who aren't used to being questioned or being provided corrective criticism. Unfortunately, due to sunshine law this is the only way we can get it done, and if we are going to do our best for SPS, we must be willing to assess ourselves critically and work on solutions publicly.

I want what's best for students. I think SPS can make many improvements, and when we make those, there will be more to make. Being honest about our deficiencies is the only way for us to be our most successful.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I appreciate this question as it's an issue that's very important to the larger education landscape. As a board member for SPS, my abilities to have an impact on this issue are very minimal. This is a question for elected office holders in Jefferson City. As board members, we can certainly advocate and try to move the needle, but in my experience, this really has very little impact on what comes out of Jefferson City. I've had conversations with many reps and senators about this topic, but I've really only tried to understand the different positions they have, and I've also provided cautionary advice to them about the possible unintended consequences that come from any education bill at the state level. At the local level we have a lot to navigate to be in compliance with the law, this is probably the biggest reason we've seen the size of the administrative staff at SPS grow to the level it's at, and expenses have grown as well.

I support local control consistently and vocally. I think SPS knows what's best for SPS and that may be different than any other district in the state. We have school board elections every single May. The more the control is local, the more power the stakeholders have in directing the course of the district they live in by voting for board members who reflect their values.

I support a strong SPS. It's vital to our community. I think more local control will lead to a stronger SPS. For this reason I haven't supported vouchers or sweeping education reform at the state level. Most importantly however, this is not a question for local board members. What's most important for local board members is to focus on what's in their control. It's most important to know that local board members are committed to the mission of the district and making SPS the best version of itself it can be. I have a track record of doing just that.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

I will address the 3 biggest issues facing SPS through the lens of impact on student learning and achievement.

1) Student behaviors and teacher recruitment and retention: This is not unique to SPS and is not caused by SPS but nonetheless it's a challenge we must meet or student success will continue to be greatly impacted. We have about 700 K-5 teachers in SPS and in the last 4 years 400 of them have turned over. Teachers are making more money than they ever have (I've voted for teacher raises every year) and we remain the highest compensated district in the area and well above state averages. They're leaving because of what the job has become, and the primary reason is the out-of-control student behaviors. Our superintendent has cracked down on teachers and raised expectations in the district. But as one SPS teacher told me, "It feels like more and more is being expected of us and meanwhile the students can do whatever they want with no consequences." That's a recipe to lose good teachers. Teachers need to know that there will be higher expectations of everyone: teachers, admins, students, board members, and parents. We can't put it all on the teachers.

As many veteran teachers have retired they've been replaced with young teachers who haven't fully developed classroom management skills to the extent that many of today's behaviorally challenged classrooms require. Our teachers must be equipped to manage classroom behaviors, and they need the full support of the administration to ensure there will be progressive consequences of action if a student refuses to follow the rules. I have consistently pushed for stronger and more consistent discipline policies as a board member and have not seen this done yet to the extent that is necessary. No, I don't support paddling, like fellow board member Steve Makoski suggested, but I would support more alternative settings and more admin support to teachers through enforcement of the student handbook. The rules are there, they're just too often bent or appropriate consequences aren't being enforced.

Additionally, student cell phone use is very much a problem in our schools, and it needs to be eliminated. I pushed last summer to create a board policy that reflected the language in our student handbook and although all 7 board members agreed that it was a problem that needed fixed, 4 declined to approve a policy that would have brought needed board-level support to the issue. Our current procedures are not working. Cell phones continue to be used throughout the day in many middle schools and especially high schools. There is no need to "ban" them from the buildings or to supply Yonder bags (But if this is the preferred route by staff I would certainly be open to it). The use of cell phones during the school day simply should not be allowed in either the student handbook or by board policy, and that rule should be enforced with progressive consequences until the behavior is corrected. This would not impact the budget and could be fully implemented in a quarter or semester and would be the one of the fastest, cheapest ways we could impact student behavior, student achievement, and teacher retention.

One of the reasons I support this as a policy is that it would be uniform throughout the district and everyone: parents, students, teachers, admins, superintendent, and the board of education would understand the simple rules. This would make it easier on teachers to not have to navigate which parts of the school or what part of the day they are allowed. Everyone would know they are not allowed to be used during the school day and everyone would know the consequences. Without a uniform policy

that's simple and clear, it will continue to be a burden on the teachers to manage, also, with a complicated set of rules that allow the use for many situations, times, and places, it will overburden teachers and reduce learning time for them to try to manage.

2) Budget and Bond.

We're in our second of four consecutive years of budgeted deficit spending. $15MM more needs to be cut from our budget in the next two years. With about 80% of our spending going to salaries and benefits there is no other way to address this without cuts to staff.

Staff cuts have happened and will continue for the next two years. It's projected we will stabilize beyond that, that attendance will remain flat, but if the projections are wrong, and I certainly have my doubts about the boundary and demographic study, we could be in for more cuts. The only way to ensure we see at least flat attendance or rising attendance, in my point of view, is if student academic performance rises, and that gives rise to better perceptions of SPS.

Every board member and candidate will say they support teacher raises. That's easy to say. At this time, the only way to ensure it will happen is with fiscal responsibility, and where the rubber meets the road is in the budget. We must protect our revenues and expenditures. Now is not the time to add special programs and projects to the budget, or to grow off-site administrative staff. We can't grow special programs that only affect a few students to the tune of millions per year while simultaneously laying off teachers. Our resources must be focused on the classroom in a way that allows all students to receive a robust K-12 education. Every candidate will say they fully support teacher pay raises. No other candidate or sitting board member can more firmly say they have done that while also making the hard but necessary decisions to be a budget hawk to ensure we can afford to do so.

We're currently in the middle of a $220MM bond to rebuild Pipkin and Reed, to remodel or rebuild Pershing, and to add safety improvements across the district. It's important that we deliver on our promises and don't overspend on any of those projects so that we can move down the list to the next of many projects that are needed. Another bond will be proposed in 3 or so years. For that one to be successful, the current one must be successful. As we spend somewhere in the neighborhood of $500MM in the next 5 years it's important that we're responsible to the taxpayers in ensuring that those funds go toward buildings that are focused on what the students need, and not what the adults want. I've served as a board representative during the bond process to ensure that the process is sound and responsible to lead to the best possible results for education. The buildings we're designing are efficient and effective, yet still something to be proud of, and this is an improvement over some of the mistakes in the past, most notably Jarrett where money was spent in many ways that had no impact on education. If I'm not re-elected we will have no one on the board with any kind of construction experience to help the other board members navigate the bonds.

3) Superintendent.

Hiring and managing the superintendent is the most important responsibility of the board of education. The success of the district depends on the competency and effectiveness of its leader. It's a very tough job at a very tough time.

I'll preface this next statement by saying it's not based on any specific knowledge. It's possible or maybe even likely that the winners of this election will take part in selecting a new superintendent. I have no idea how long Dr. Lathan intends to stay with SPS. This is not a conversation that the board has had with her and wouldn't be appropriate. I do know that it's a very tough job and it consumes her

life. She works far beyond a 40-hour week, well into her nights and weekends. Superintendents often only stick around 5-7 years, and at some point it will just make sense for her to retire and enjoy life or do something less demanding and she would have plenty of opportunities to do that. When that time comes, selecting a new superintendent will pave the way for the next 5-7 years.

We must have a board that understands its role. While it's not our job to meddle in the day to day operations of the district, it is our job to manage the superintendent, and to hold her accountable if a direction gets off course. We do that through policy and through accountability with her review and contract. The current makeup of our board has 4 members who have never, in my 3 years on the board, voted against a superintendent recommendation or disagreed with her publicly, even if they do so privately. It's vital for the health of the district and the best interests of the stakeholders that we have full transparency, intellectually honest conversations, and accountability in practice in the boardroom. I have consistently done this in my first term on the board, and it's crucially important that we continue to elect board members who will also do this and not see themselves as a wall of support around the superintendent. Sometimes we will disagree. That's ok. If we don't, something is wrong.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

For the first time in a couple decades we have consecutive years of growth on assessment scores and our APR has grown each of the last 3 years. This is very encouraging, and I think there is more we can do to continue that momentum.

We've shortened the curriculum adoption cycle and implemented many changes in this area. I think we are better positioned, and it's time to pump the brakes on so much change that causes teachers to relearn new systems and approaches. The teachers need time to fully master new curriculum and the (yet again) new universal screener.

Choice programs offer something unique to SPS than can help fulfill its vision to be the "District of Choice." I believe we have some great programs. My daughter attended AOE and I was able to witness firsthand how great that program is, but as with anything balance is important. My fear with these programs is that they are not equitable or accessible for many families in the district since transportation is not provided, and the students in these programs cost more to the district which causes an unequitable financial strain that can negatively impact our ability to provide "high-quality academic opportunities for EACH STUDENT." At this time of budget cuts, we should not be looking to grow these programs, but the ones we have we should be proud of.

The bond and construction process is improved, and I believe we are building more financially responsible buildings as a result. These facilities are still great buildings that the local communities should be proud of and they are more focused on what students need to be successful.

A reduced dependence on Chromebooks for learning is positive for the young minds we are teaching, and I'd like to see us improve on the programming that teaches students HOW to use technology proficiently.

We continue to be the highest compensated district in the area as compared with other districts that we are competing against for quality teachers.

We have a healthy fund balance and have been able to catch up on many capital fund projects that had been ignored or deferred in the past.

We have a superintendent who is highly focused on literacy and who has implemented many programs to ensure we are improving in this area.

We have many great staff members who do amazing things on a daily basis by going above and beyond to meet student needs. These should be highlighted.

The unified communication platform between the classroom and the home is a great start in response to my consistent push for better communication at the classroom level, and not just a focus on communications at the district level. I think there is more to do, but this is a good stat.

The comprehensive technology plan was a great opportunity for SPS to be leaders in the state by making a transparent commitment to what our intentions are in applying technology to learning and to ensuring students are being trained on how to be fluent with the use of technology. I think it's important that we be intentional about technology and transparent about our goals with the stakeholders.

The districts new strategic plan that I helped guide and adopt in my first term is a great improvement on refocusing SPS on Academic Achievement, as the administration had gotten a little distracted over the years prior.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

I'll be short on this response as I believe my response to the question "What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?" covers it.

Student behaviors, and their impact on student learning and teacher retention.

- Budget cuts
- Bonds
- Teacher turnover
- Climate and Culture
- Appropriate balance of technology and screen time
- Cell phone use, particularly in high schools and some middle schools and teachers not having the ability to control the issue without sacrificing learning time.
- Social/Political issues driving wedges between teachers and parents
- Rifts between teachers and admin
- 3-Tiered start times
- Closing smaller schools in an effort to gain efficiencies but at the cost of a true sense of community.
- State and Federal laws and mandates that conflict with local control and what's in SPS best interest.
- HR and operations
- A very obvious and public division between the largest teacher group (SNEA) and the administration.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

Every candidate and board member will say they support teachers, keeping teachers, and providing raises. Those words don't mean anything if we aren't protecting the entire budget from unnecessary costs. No board member has been more aware of this than I have. The largest example to point to, which I've already mentioned, was the vote on the Alliance for Healthcare which added $1,000,000 to the operations budget during a time we knew staff were going to be laid off for the next 4 years.

Any decisions that cause our student to teacher ratios to climb negatively impact the quality of education. We must protect that.

We have lost 1500 students since 2019 and haven't gained them back. This has caused our state funding to be decreased. That's just how it works. If we have less students, then we shouldn't need as much resources to educated those students, so cutbacks are necessary. I for one, am keenly focused on student to teacher ratios and making sure those cutbacks impact the classroom level the least.

So as every candidate will undoubtedly say they stand with teachers, raises, and no cutbacks I hope that my track record for actually making the hard decisions stands out.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

I have consistently advocated for greater transparency and communication at SPS. I don't believe this lies in a new logo, or more texts and emails from the SPS communication department. I believe that true impactful improvements lie in the classroom level. Teachers are having a harder time than ever with challenging parents and students who second guess everything they do. This is a larger cultural issue that has come from a divided national political landscape as well as effects of social media.

I believe we need to be more personal. When parents know their student's teachers beyond a name or email communication, more trust can be formed and this will reduce the us vs. them mentality that has really grown.

I've always maintained an open line of communication with anyone who would like to talk. I meet in person when I can. I ensure their email concerns have been addressed.

I have concerns that when the administration has done surveys or committees in the past they haven't given their best effort to addressing concerns or suggestions raised but use these methods conveniently and selectively to support preconceived ideas. I try to make sure that feedback is valued and acted on when necessary including the district's climate and culture survey from 2024 that I believe was largely ignored.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

MSTA has endorsed me in the past and SNEA has not. Regardless, I have collaborated with teacher groups to hear their concerns about any issues. I am certainly one of the most communicative current board members with teacher groups.

MSTA has not reached out to me very often with concerns, but I would certainly prioritize that and make sure we get a call or meeting scheduled. SNEA has been very communicative from time to time on a wide range of issues including climate and culture, school safety, nutrition, SRO officers, teacher cutbacks, student behaviors, school closings, annualized pay, and other issues. I've always been collaborative in ensuring that I hear their concerns and where appropriate address that with the superintendent or use that information to help guide my decisions. I would encourage the MSTA to reach out at any time there is an issue of concern.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I think I've touched on several of these topics already, but I will add some comments on ones that I have not.

Annualized pay: When this issue first arose, I worked with the SNEA to schedule a zoom call to hear out many hourly workers on this issue. Probably 20 or so participated. It was helpful to me to hear their concerns and apply that to my position. I have advocated for reinstituting annualized pay because I believe it's something we can do, many staff members want it, and it would be of benefit to the district in hiring and retaining staff. I do not believe this issue is dead and I continue to work toward bringing it back.

School Boundaries: This is overdue and necessary for success. I have great concerns that the boundary and demographic study was accurate and I've expressed my concerns that we make any changes as a result of that study. This resulted in a revised recommendation that addressed a few current and pressing needs while we took the time to further research and form a committee to understand the middle school boundaries. I think we need a second opinion on that study.

SRO Positions: After the SRO SNEA rep spoke to the board I immediately scheduled a meeting with him and had a follow up conversation with Grenita. We cannot be reducing SRO officers. Grenita assured me that we were only eliminating 2 positions, not employees, that had remained unfilled for quite some time due to a lack of being able to find qualified poeple to fill them. This was an effort to create a more accurate budget. I told her my concern was that if we eliminated the positions we would stop searching for new candidates to hire new officers. I would only support this if she could ensure that we would continue to search for more officers. She agreed and said if they were found, it would come back to the board as a budget amendment to hire them. The next day the jobs were reposted on the website. As a result of my conversations on this issue it seems clear to me that we need to better position ourselves to recruit qualified candidates for these positions. I think our recruiting strategies

need to be improved and we also need to consider what it will take to convince law enforcement individuals to come over to be an SRO.

Librarians: I've been working on this issue to ensure we don't make a decision that will negatively impact literacy in our schools. I, and other board members, have urged Grenita to look elsewhere for cuts.

Teacher Autonomy: I, and other board members, have urged Grenita to maintain teacher autonomy and creativity as she is simultaneously trying to raise the standards in SPS.

Curriculum Adoption: I've been in support of adopting new curriculum in several areas to ensure teachers have the proper resources to be most effective. I think it's important that we maintain flexibility in our resources that provide both digital and physical options, as I believe we got too dependent on digital only. At this time, I think we've made some necessary changes and need to pause these new systems so that teachers have the ability to learn them without so much time spent on professional learning and so much time lost to adapting to new systems, methods, and processes.

BOE actions: I was disheartened that our board almost unanimously agreed that cell phones are a concern in our district and we needed to do something about it, then 4 board members neglected to vote for a policy that reflected our student handbook language.

I think our board missed the mark on the vote for the Alliance for Healthcare for the reasons I mentioned previously.

I think our board needs to act on annualized pay.

I think Grenita responds well to a board that has a clear majority direction, and our board needs to act more swiftly and decisively on many issues, and Grenita will respond. I think we could find common ground on discipline and cell phones for sure.

Gail Smart

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

I practiced law in Radcliffe, Kentucky and was the administrator of the county public defender system during that time. I was part of a firm where we handled civil and criminal matters. After moving to Springfield, and while raising my two sons, I focused on volunteering in my sons' schools, which led to me becoming a wider community volunteer and public school advocate in the Springfield community.

For over 30 years, I have been engaged and involved in our public schools or in our community all that time. While my sons attended SPS, I was heavily involved in the PTA, often serving as an officer. I was the co-director for 8 years of the Well of Life food pantry in which eight downtown churches served those in need in the 65806 zip code area. I served on the SPS Foundation Board in its early years. I was a committee chair on the Every Child Promise initiative. I co-chaired the Poverty Commission for its two year mission and currently serve on the Community Foundation for the Ozarks Board of Directors. I was a founding member of the Advancing Women PAC that is focused at elevating women in elected leadership roles.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

Springfield has been my home for over 30 years, and I care that it remains a thriving city where all have a chance to succeed. A healthy public education system is a critical component of its continued vibrancy. I am running because I want to make sure every student has a chance to be successful while they are in school and beyond graduation. The public in public school means everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or any other special need is provided free and equal access to an education.

Striving to be a school board member isn't about me. It's about elevating the voices of others–parents, guardians, students, educators, and staff to ensure they have the resources needed to succeed.

Advocating for and supporting public education have always been very important to me. Both of my sons graduated from SPS and while they were in school, I was very involved in the PTA at Sunshine, Jarrett, and Parkview often serving as an officer and was president of their athletic booster clubs.

I also care about education because my family has a history of working in public education. My husband, Clif Smart, was president of Missouri State University, my mother-in-law was a long time high school English teacher, and my oldest son, Murray, taught for three years in Rogers, Arkansas. It's personal. I understand why teachers and staff need board members who are looking out for their best interests, and I will do just that.

My love for students and helping change directions through quality public education is really what motivates me to serve. While I believe the district is making improvements, I would like to help it be better. Public education is facing many challenges, and I want to be a part of ensuring our schools in Springfield are strong and thriving. I believe I bring a positive, steady, trusted voice to the board table. At this season of life–I'll be able to fully dedicate my all to service on the board.

When I was a practicing attorney, I represented clients who possessed a variety of legal needs, and I was the administrator of the county public defender system. My ability and training to review contracts, understand legal risks, and ensure policies and regulations are met will be an asset. I know how to listen, reflect, and determine an appropriate course of action. This experience also offered invaluable lessons on getting along with many different personalities, and it taught me the importance of empathy and compassion for others.

I care about our community and have been a fierce community advocate for those struggling to be successful. I served as co-director of the Well of Life food pantry for eight years where I oversaw the day-to-day operations of the pantry, helped craft budgets built on donations from eight downtown churches and the community, and served for several years on the board as board president. In short, I know how to mobilize a community organization, budget accordingly, and get things done.

I co-chaired the local Poverty Commission for two years. We brought together city officials, university professors, community leaders, members of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, and others to collectively learn about root causes and assess best practices to address the growing, but at that time, largely ignored issue of poverty in Springfield. We set a vision, measurable goals, and strategies to move toward reducing the poverty rate. Because of the work of this commission and the programs it launched, the poverty rate in Springfield has declined according to local data.

I proudly served on the SPS Foundation Board for a number of years. Serving on this board helped me become familiar with the needs of teachers and the importance of raising private money. I also got a first hand look at how committed teachers are to making their classrooms the best they could be by taking their time to research and submit grant requests.

I am in my fifth year serving on the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and am on the executive board as secretary. The board currently oversees a $500,000,000 budget. Being a part of budget workshops and budget strategy sessions has enabled me to make informed decisions that align with the Foundation's goals. I'm committed to bringing that same diligence to the SPS budget priorities. I am fiscally conservative and understand the importance of public trust and transparency. I will support a budget that seeks to support the goals of the organization. In the case of Springfield Public Schools, the adopted budget must support academic achievement and employee retention. Additionally, I have experience in helping provide input into and approving CFO's strategic plan, leading during the search process for a nation-wide search for the organization's next president, and working to hold the new president accountable to those goals. These factors prepare me to be a school board member.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

I have received the endorsement of United Springfield. United Springfield is a non-partisan Political Action Committee that supports individuals who share their mission to unite our children, citizens, and community. And, I have received an endorsement from Advance. I was a founding member of this PAC dedicated to recruiting and supporting women running for partisan and nonpartisan offices in Southwest Missouri.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

Transparency, honesty, respect for others, empathy, service, accountability, humility, kindness, and practicality are just some of the values that guide my decision making. Making sure I am true to myself and adhere to my personal values when working with others builds trust and respect. I believe you must genuinely value each person's contribution and what they bring to the discussion.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

This is probably not something the school board is going to determine. These decisions will be set at the state and federal level. As a school board, we will have little to say regarding this issue. Even so, I will work with our local legislators and educate myself regarding state legislations that will advocate for public schools over vouchers or charter schools. I will support local bond measures and school funding initiatives. I will also always be an advocate for students who are struggling to ensure all students receive a quality education.

If you are asking my personal opinion regarding school vouchers, this is not a good use of taxpayer dollars. It will take money away from public schools and strip them of resources necessary to have cutting edge support and programs and the resources to help students.

Vouchers for private schools and charter schools also take away from the limited pool of educators to select from each year. Additionally, they take away the support of parents and families that the local school needs. Instead of strengthening their neighborhood by using their talents and treasures, the result is that the public schools are weakened.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

My priorities are as follows:

Ensuring Student Success- we must always ensure we are providing every student in every school the tools they need to succeed within our schools and after graduation. I'll collaborate with our teachers, business community, and higher education to ensure our kids have access to the resources they need to thrive throughout their time in our schools and beyond.

Investing in School Safety - safety is the foundation of success for any community, and that is especially true for schools. As I visit in the community, this is often mentioned by parents as their #1 issue of concern. Springfield has made important investments in making our schools safer for our students and educators in recent years, and I will pledge that I will work to see those investments are fully implemented. Further, I will work to ensure school safety remains a priority for future investment while I am a member of the board.

Promoting Financial Discipline - I've spent my career involved in Springfield's civic, charitable, and public organizations. Without sound financial management, the mission will always suffer. On the

Springfield School Board, I'll ensure that we will make sound budget decisions with our resources that will promote school safety and student performance while protecting the long-term fiscal stability of the district. My training has taught me to ask tough questions, insist on financial accountability, and ensure budget allocations and expenditures align with the board approved strategic plan.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

I believe that SPS has a lot to celebrate and that the teachers and the district need to be cheered on. As reported in the local newspapers, the most talked about successes are the improvement in Academic Achievement, the district has increased its overall scores in math, science, and English on the Annual Performance Report for the third straight year, and graduation rates are up from 2024. Teachers have mentioned successes such as our small neighborhood elementary schools in our district. Teachers in small neighborhood elementary schools have the advantage of being better connected to their students (often smaller class sizes) and their parents or guardians. Another success teachers have mentioned is the Step Up mentoring program that the district requires for all first and second year teachers. Teacher mentorship is another important tool for recruiting and retaining teachers. Having a mentorship program such as Step Up, shows the district is focused on "passing the torch" to a new generation of educators while communicating to new teachers they are respected and valued. The district should also be celebrating all of the new collaborations with stakeholders: SPS University, Superintendent Solutions, Gather with Granita, Principal for a Day, SPS Ambassadors, to name a few.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

While there are many challenges facing SPS, I would like to talk about the following three.

Safety is a multi-layered issue. It encompasses threats to both students and educators from outside and inside the building. Student behavior and discipline continue to be an issue, more prevalent since the pandemic, and administrators, educators, and families must have the resources to address these concerns. Last year, school resource officers responded to 4700 calls for service, up from previous year. There were 571 assaults reported, more than double from the year before and 55 weapon calls. This does not seem to be the time to lose any school resource officers due to budget cuts. Fostering a positive climate often begins with teachers feeling safe in their classrooms and having discipline strategies that work. I would also encourage close and consistent monitoring of practices and procedures for student use of cell phones during the school day. While behavior is not the only reason people leave the profession, it is a deciding factor for far too many.

SPS is focused on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports to address discipline issues. PBIS encourages proactive approaches, rewarding positive behaviors, and offers support for students who struggle. Effective discipline teaches students respect, responsibility, and accountability. I agree there needs to be a balance with fairness and support for students who face emotional or behavioral challenges. But, students who continually struggle to follow directions or who are violent should be moved to an alternative program/site offered by the district.

The 2023 bond issue included about $7 million for specific safety improvements. Last year SPS hired an outside firm to audit its safety measures, i.e. safety training, emergency procedures and identify safety needs in all its buildings. The district received high marks for its training and emergency

procedures, camera coverage, and the visitor check-in system. I will continue to champion these needed efforts.

Teacher retention is a big concern. Research shows high-quality teachers are the number one factor contributing to student success. There are multiple ways to approach this issue. Raising educators' salaries is an important strategy to ease the staffing shortage, but it is not the only answer.

SPS should prioritize strengthening its relationship with the three Springfield universities, all having robust educator preparation programs. In 2021, MSU and SPS signed an agreement to create a Future Educator Program. This "Grow Your Own" program is a districtwide initiative that identifies under-resourced high school juniors, seniors, and college students, as well as non-certified school staff who want to become educators. Graduates commit to teaching in SPS once they complete the program. The state of Missouri's fiscal year 2024 budget included funding for this program. We must continue to recruit teachers that are educated in strong teacher preparation programs.

Supporting teacher professional development is critical. This is a way for them to continue to grow professionally, and I would support various learning opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and mentoring to help teachers maximize effectiveness in their classrooms.

Declining revenue is likely on the horizon as Missouri continues to reduce state taxes and federal ESSER dollars conclude. The district may not be able to count on significant new money to fund increasing teacher and staff salaries, starting new programs, or hiring additional employees. As a result, the board will have to work with the superintendent to prioritize critical initiatives to fund and reallocate money to those priorities by reducing spending elsewhere. My established relationships working with our local representatives in the legislature–Melanie Stinnett, Lincoln Hough, Curtis Trent, John Black, Alex Riley, Stephanie Hein, Betsy Fogle, and Jeremy Dean– will help me advocate for policies, laws, and funding in favor of public education.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

High quality teachers are the number one factor contributing to student success. Raising teachers' salaries is an important strategy to ease the staffing shortage, but that strategy alone is unlikely to be successful or yield the desired results.

Not only do we need to listen and respond to what teachers need, but we also need to celebrate and recognize the incredible work they are doing each and every day. Employee engagement increases when one's talents and contributions are recognized and appreciated. It causes individuals to want to stay. While our focus is always on student success, as a board member, I am also a trustee to ensure our nearly 4000 employees—teachers and staff– have a healthy work environment. I will champion policies that reflect that support.

Recruiting and training more paraprofessionals to support and ease the burdens of teachers in the classrooms is one way to retain high-quality teachers. There are currently thirty-one paraprofessional jobs open in Springfield. A paraprofessional or instructional aide can help manage the classroom or help a student who needs more guidance or instruction. This extra help can make a big difference to a student's learning experience as well as help a teacher.

As stated earlier in the above question, declining revenue is likely on the horizon as Missouri continues to reduce state taxes and federal ESSER dollars conclude. The district may not be able to count on significant new money to fund increasing teacher and staff salaries, starting new programs, or hiring additional employees. As a result, the board will have to work with the superintendent to prioritize critical initiatives to fund and reallocate money to those priorities by reducing spending elsewhere. My experience working on not-for-profit boards with limited funding and my established relationships working with our local representatives in the in the legislature will help me advocate for policies, laws, and funding in favor of public education.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

I will attend workshops, study sessions, and board meetings and stay in communication with the superintendent as well as other board members. I have the time and welcome meetings to collaborate with stakeholder groups-whether that be the PTA, MSTA, SNEA, Teamsters, community members, etc. I would expect the superintendent and administration to do the same. I am curious and I will enjoy asking questions to learn so I can be well advised. More importantly, I believe those directly impacted by current and future decisions should be involved in the collaborative partnership with the district from the beginning, not hearing about decisions without input.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

Effective communication and collaboration between board members and teacher organizations is essential. Transparency is essential. Teacher organizations should feel comfortable sharing concerns, ideas, and feedback. I would encourage regular communication or monthly reports and updates throughout the school year.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

Student Behavior -
We must look at strategies and use practices aimed at maintaining order, promoting positive behavior, and ensuring a safe and quality learning environment. SPS is currently implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in all its buildings. This strategy focuses on proactive approaches and rewards positive behavior.

Effective discipline teaches students respect, responsibility, and accountability. I believe there needs to be a balance with fairness and support for students who face emotional or behavioral challenges. But, students who continually struggle to follow directions or who are violent should be moved to an alternative program/site offered by the district. Providing temporary or long-term alternatives for students who repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior allows them to continue their education in a structured setting.

Balanced and inclusive approaches are vital to create fair, supportive, and effective discipline policies that consider diverse student needs and promote a positive school climate.

Annualized Pay -
I am in favor of revisiting the question of Annualized Pay. Having been the director of a local food pantry for 8 years, I understand the hardship that any change in a person's paycheck can cause. I understand that the school district's auditors and attorneys have advised that annualized pay is not a best practice and that allowing staff to choose between how they would like to be paid (hourly or annually), is not currently offered. I would want to inquire as to why staff is not able to choose how they are paid.

Resource Officers -
Student behavior and discipline continue to be an issue, more prevalent since the pandemic, and administrators, educators, and families must have the resources to address these concerns. Last year, school resource officers responded to 4700 calls for service, up from previous year. There were 571 assaults reported, more than double from the year before and 55 weapon calls. This does not seem to be the time to lose any school resource officers due to budget cuts. Fostering a positive climate often begins with teachers feeling safe in their classrooms and having discipline strategies that work. I would also encourage close and consistent monitoring of practices and procedures for student use of cell phones during the school day. While behavior is not the only reason people leave the profession, it is a deciding factor for far too many.

Teacher Autonomy --
As I've talked with teachers over the last few months, this is an issue of top concern. Feeling over-burdened by the focus on standardized testing and data collection takes time away from teaching and time away from students. Now that we know that the funding is going to be inadequate, monitoring teachers less and trusting teachers more is going to be important.

Sarah Hough

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

Throughout my life, I have been deeply committed to public education and community service. Growing up in a family of educators, I saw firsthand the impact that strong schools have on students and communities. My father was a teacher, principal, and superintendent, and my mother worked as a speech pathologist and high school teacher. While I did not pursue a career in education, their work and a strong belief in public education inspired me to dedicate much of my civic work to supporting education.

As an SPS parent, I have children at Field Elementary and Phelps Center for the Gifted. I have been involved in the Field Elementary PTA and have volunteered in multiple classroom activities over the years. I have also been fortunate to support many SPS initiatives through my philanthropic work at Bass Pro Shops. My team developed and administers the Explore the Ozarks Grant Fund, a grant through Community Foundation of the Ozarks that supports experiential conservation education and field trips in SWMO. We have also supported the Foundation for Springfield Public Schools Foundation Back to School grants as well the SPS Back to School bash.

I have also served on several nonprofit boards, including Care to Learn, Springfield Innovation Inc., The Discovery Center, and the Downtown YMCA Advisory Board. Each of these organizations plays a vital role in supporting students, whether through meeting basic needs, providing services, enhancing STEM education, or fostering innovation. These nonprofits develop and support our youth and spark innovation in our community. Serving on these boards has given me a broad perspective on issues facing our students and community.

Finally, in 2009, I co-founded a community foundation to support my hometown school district. The foundation has funded student scholarships, capital improvements, and safety updates, ensuring that students have access to quality resources and safe learning environments.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

I am running for the Springfield Public Schools Board of Education because I believe in the transformative power of public education and the importance of strong parent representation on the board. As a mother of two children currently enrolled in SPS, an active community leader, and a business professional, I am deeply invested in ensuring that our schools provide high-quality education and a safe learning environment for all students.

My professional background has uniquely prepared me for this role. I currently lead Community and Outfitter Engagement at Bass Pro Shops. I serve on the Senior HR Leadership team and manage a team that oversees the company's community-based philanthropy efforts, employee engagement and recognition programs, our non-profit employee foundation and other strategic initiatives that impact our Outfitters (employees).

Much like our school system, Bass Pro Shops is a complicated organization with 200+ locations and multiple segments of business spanning from retail to manufacturing. As a leader in the company, I am faced with weighing decisions that impact our 35,000+ Outfitters across the country. I am accustomed to reviewing complex issues with multiple groups of stakeholders in mind. In my role, I have to consider how decisions and new processes will impact our retail employees, managers, our customers and more. My professional experience has prepared me well to understand how issues impact our students, teachers, parents and community members and make decisions balancing multiple stakeholder interests.

Finally, as a mom of two kids in our district, I would bring a valuable parent perspective to the board. I believe my voice as a parent is especially needed, and it's something I would uniquely bring to the table. If elected, I would be the only board member whose school-aged children all attend Springfield Public Schools.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

I have received the endorsement of United Springfield, a non-partisan PAC.

I have interviewed with the Springfield Labor Council and the SNEA endorsement committees. They have not announced endorsements yet.

I was also invited to participate in an endorsement process with the Greene County Republican Central Committee. I declined to participate out of respect for the non-partisan nature of the Board of Education.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

The values that guide my decision-making as a leader are integrity, collaboration, and accountability. As a board member, I think it's important to always remember that you represent the interest of all of the SPS stakeholders - students, educators, support staff, parents and community members.

Integrity means making decisions based on what is best for students and educators, not based on politics or special interests. I believe in transparency and open communication, ensuring that our school board remains accountable to the community it serves.

Collaboration is key to creating positive change. I will work closely with educators, parents, administrators, and community leaders to ensure our district is addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities for students.

Accountability means using data-driven decision-making and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programs. The board should hold itself and the administration accountable for meeting strategic goals and improving student outcomes.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I do not support vouchers or the expansion of charter schools. I believe we should focus on strengthening our public schools to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education. Diverting funds from public schools to private institutions dilutes the already scarce resources available to the majority of students and creates inequities. Missouri is already below the median in public education funding, we can't afford to fall further behind by siphoning funds to private or charter schools that don't have the same level of accountability as public schools. Instead, I support investing in public education to improve outcomes for all students in our community.

I have followed the outcomes of the Arkansas Learns voucher program in our neighboring state. After two years, nearly 85% of the vouchers were utilized by students who were NOT in a public school the previous year. Overwhelmingly, they are seeing vouchers go to support students who were not in public schools to begin with. As a board, we must continue to follow the outcomes of these programs in other school districts and states so we understand the impact these types of programs make on public education.

As the largest school district in the state, I believe SPS leaders should be at the table advocating for funding and policies that provide more resources for public education, not less.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

Protecting students and educators - As a mom, the safety of our students and educators will always be my top priority. And as a board member, I will work to ensure our schools are equipped with the safety and discipline measures needed to provide safe learning environments. When you talk to educators, it's no secret that classroom behavior has been an issue since COVID - and that's not an issue unique to Springfield. SPS has implemented a plan, but the board needs to continue to make it a priority to ensure the plan is being implemented successfully. And if it's not, we must find other ways to address behavior so teachers can focus on teachers and students can focus on learning.

Promote student learning - I will work to ensure every student has access to a great education in the Springfield school district and that we are achieving the academic excellence that our students deserve. If you've followed the news the last few weeks, you will have seen that SPS has for the 3rd year in a row shown improvement in our attendance rates, graduation rates and in test scores. That's HUGE and we need to continue to build on that to make sure we are preparing students for success.

Focusing on student achievement also opens the door for our community to attract and retain families and businesses who are looking at the quality of the schools as factors in where to live and do business. I believe academic achievement and opportunities matter for our kids, but they matter for our community too.

Preserving tax dollars - I'll use my business experience to ensure we are spending our tax dollars wisely. Tightening budgets and increased competition for public school funding are going to continue to be issues we face. As we face difficult budget choices we must prioritize our educators and students while being innovative and transparent.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

While there is always room for improvement, Springfield Public Schools has many achievements to celebrate. Over the past three years, SPS has seen consistent improvement in test scores, graduation rates and attendance. We should recognize the effort that educators and students have invested in this growth and celebrate it.

Springfield Public Schools has also been a leader statewide in using formative assessments and data driven instruction to drive academic improvement in the district. The use of the Renaissance District Common Assessments and Common Formative Assessments will continue to provide insight into student learning and allow teachers to meet students where they are. We should be proud of the tools we have implemented to advance student outcomes.

Additionally, we should celebrate the programs to support our early career teachers including the mentorship programs in place and master teacher observations. Providing these extra supports for new educators helps aid in ensuring our new educators are supported and connected as they enter the field of education.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

There are many challenging issues facing SPS and the institution of public education, but three major challenges rise to the top for me:

Teacher Recruitment and Retention: High-quality teachers are the backbone of student success. According to research published by RAND (a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization), when determining the most important school-related factors for student performance, teachers have been found to have an impact that is two to three times greater than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, and school leadership. Because of this, I believe recruiting and retaining great teachers and support professionals must be top priority.

School Safety: The safety of students and educators should remain a top priority for all leaders in the district. We must ensure our educators and students feel safe in their learning and working environments. As a board member, I will advocate for the safety and discipline measures needed to provide safe learning environments. We must ensure we have processes and technology in place to ensure the physical safety of our buildings, buses and any place we have students and educators. We must also ensure that we are addressing discipline and behavior issues in the district consistently and effectively.

Student Achievement: Our students deserve to have the best education possible. As a school district, we must remain focused on ensuring all students meet or exceed academic benchmarks so they have every opportunity to succeed. Focusing on student achievement also opens the door for our community to attract and retain families and businesses who are looking at the quality of the schools as factors in where to live and do business.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

I am not sure we will see the full impact of the recent budget cuts until the changes are implemented. However, I have listened to staff and parents alike and agree with the concern that cuts will impact teachers and students directly via a loss of resources. I am further concerned about the Governor's recent announcement that his proposed budget does not fully fund the state's foundation formula for public education. We are going to continue to see funding for public education threatened. As a board, I believe we must approach the budget process with the best interest of students at the forefront of our decision-making. While we do not make decisions on each specific budget line, I believe the board must make clear to the administration our priorities in advance of the budget development. We must prioritize keeping as many classroom and teacher support positions as possible.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

Good communication is important for the overall engagement and morale of any organization. As a board member, I would start by listening and seeking to understand the viewpoints and needs of the multiple groups of stakeholders and sharing those viewpoints with fellow board members and administrators. I would also advocate for clear and consistent communication between the administration and all levels of stakeholders. I believe the more we seek and share feedback and give insight into how decisions are made the better we are able to engage all of the stakeholders.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

I strongly believe that teacher organizations should have a direct and open line of communication with the board and administration. Teachers are the frontline experts in our schools, and their voices must be considered when making decisions about curriculum, policies, and working conditions. Teachers should be at the table in making decisions that affect their everyday work.

I would also advocate for regular feedback mechanisms to be in place to ensure that educators input is received in an easy and straightforward way. We should operate with transparency in sharing district data, budgets and how decisions are made. That transparency should apply to teachers, parents and community members alike.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I know that as a board member, I will be faced with making a number of decisions that impact not just students and educators, but staff, parents and the community at large. I do not take that responsibility lightly. I commit to studying issues, seeking feedback and making decisions with the best interest of students.

I enjoyed visiting with MSTA in person about some of these important issues and my thoughts/decision-making processes at our meeting on Jan. 28th. I look forward to continuing to discuss the issues that impact teachers and staff more in the coming months. Please feel free to reach out to me at sarahforsps@gmail.com or via Facebook at Sarah Hough for SPS School Board.

Dave Myers

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

I was a substitute teacher for two years, one year at SPS. This allowed me to delve into the inner workings of our schools, where I engaged face-to-face with students and teachers, as well as administrators. I am deeply committed to the betterment of our community through engagement. I have been actively involved in local community improvement initiatives such as the C-Street City Market's Culture Fest where I co-hosted the event. Groups and events like this contribute to efforts that enhance the quality of life for residents. My participation in several community choirs has allowed me to use music as a means to bring people together and foster a sense of unity. Additionally, I have had the honor of serving at the Korean War Memorial during Memorial Day ceremonies for six years, paying tribute to our nation's heroes and supporting efforts to preserve their legacy. These experiences reflect my dedication to serving and uplifting our community.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

With a strong foundation in leadership and public service, I bring a diverse and well-rounded background to the table. As a Staff Sergeant in the Army National Guard, I have honed skills in teamwork, discipline, and problem-solving. During my service in the National Guard, I was deployed as part of the COVID emergency response operations, contributing to critical efforts to safeguard public health and provide essential support to communities during a time of crisis. For my service, I was honored with a commendation medal recognizing my dedication and impact during this challenging time. My experience in local politics, including working alongside state representatives and senators, has given me valuable insights into policy-making and community advocacy. I have also served as a substitute teacher, which has provided me with firsthand experience in education and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within our schools. Additionally, I have served as a fiduciary for disabled veterans, ensuring their financial and personal well-being with integrity and care. My years as a minister of music have allowed me to connect with people on a personal level, fostering communication and collaboration within diverse groups. I also completed a Continuing Education Degree in Public Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Together, these experiences equip me with the dedication, leadership, and perspective needed to serve effectively on the school board.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

Not at this time, but I have sought them out. I have interviewed with the SNEA and United Springfield. I continue to speak to community groups when invited, but not for endorsements.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

The values that guide my decision-making are integrity, service, accountability, and collaboration. These principles have been at the core of my leadership throughout my career in the military, public service, and community involvement.

Integrity means doing what is right, even when no one is watching. As a Soldier in the National Guard, I am entrusted with the well-being of my team and the success of our missions, ensuring that every action is taken with honesty and responsibility.

Service is about putting others before myself. Whether it was during my COVID emergency response deployment, my role as a fiduciary for disabled veterans, or my time as a substitute teacher, I have always prioritized the needs of those I serve, working to make a meaningful impact.

Accountability ensures that decisions are made with careful consideration and transparency. My experience in local politics and policy-making has reinforced the importance of fiscal responsibility and ethical leadership—values I will uphold on the school board.

Collaboration and communication are key to solving complex challenges. As a music minister, I learned the power of bringing people together toward a common goal. Whether working with teachers, parents, or fellow board members, I will foster an environment where all voices are heard and respected. These values shape how I lead—by actively listening, taking decisive action, and always striving to serve my community with integrity and purpose.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I believe that public education should be a pathway to opportunity for every student, not a system where only a select few thrive while others are left behind. Advocating for strong, competitive, and effective public schools means ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources, support, and quality instruction they need to succeed.

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is underperforming—we spend approximately $20,000 per student, yet our standardized test scores are averaging a C+, and many students are reading at least two grade levels below where they should be. If we want to compete with private and charter schools, we must raise the bar and ensure that our public schools provide a high-quality education that prepares students for success.

I will advocate for transparency in budgeting to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent effectively on classroom resources, teacher support, and programs that directly impact student achievement. Additionally, we must prioritize student learning and discipline, empowering teachers to again foster an environment where students can focus and succeed. Expanding partnerships with organizations like Ozark Technical Community College and local nonprofits will also provide alternative learning pathways, ensuring that students graduate prepared for both higher education and the workforce. Public education should not be a fallback option—it should be the first and best choice for families. SPS must compete, innovate, and improve so that we don’t continue losing students to alternative schooling

options. I will work to make our district stronger, more accountable, and truly focused on student success.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

- First, responsible spending is a major challenge facing our district. The pandemic brought us some additional funds, but they were not allocated wisely. Now, we are working through cutting the budget while having to lay off teachers. At the same time, the administration is trying to create a new position that will cost the district over $100k in salary and benefits. I know there are teachers who would love to get a raise, or even keep their jobs with that money. Currently, there are 136 open positions the district would not be able to afford to fund. It would be my goal to work with other board members and the superintendent in crafting affordable, common sense approaches to staffing needs and to seek ways in which current staff and faculty could possibly cross-train or to delegate duties more efficiently. We need to be creative as well as fiscally responsible.

- Second, increased disciplinary issues, and problems with cell phones in the class, go hand-in-hand. As a substitute, I experienced first-hand issues with focus and apathetic attitudes toward classwork and learning in general. We have a policy at SPS of no cell phone usage during class time, but it is not being enforced. However, I have heard of some teachers who are individually enforcing the policy, and it is working well. Students need to understand there is no alternative, and that teachers are the arbiters of order and discipline in the classroom. Importantly, I believe teachers do not feel they can stand for these and other rules, because they do not feel adequately supported by their principals and the administration. This is not acceptable. I have spoken with teachers who have said this very thing. We as a district can and should do more to empower teachers to enforce the policy directives handed down by the Board and executed by the Superintendent.

- Third, I believe the continuity between K-12 and the world of college and career - aka adulthood - is lacking and doing a disservice to the student. As parents, my wife and I tell our children it is our job to teach them how to be good adults. That is absolutely the goal of every teacher: to educate to the best of their ability in order to help make and mold students into active and productive adults in society. However, time and time again I see students who are left behind, told they don't have many options, are ignored for one reason or another, etc. It is vital that all of our students understand their own potential, but more importantly, the potential they have to thrive and succeed in the real world. Because of social media and the instant gratification of technology, the greatest goal it seems students want to strive for is to be an influencer. Not only is this market saturated, it is unlikely, statistically, that even a fraction of our students will excel in such a venture. Our regional society and our global society need well-educated students who believe in themselves and understand there are a myriad of options out there available to them. Whether through collaborative programs that benefit the student's future (and not just a select few corporations), cooperation with non- and for-profit businesses, or even increased opportunities for study-abroad programs, SPS needs to show the vastness of our great world to our students, thereby giving them hope to see beyond the limited scope they have simply by virtue of the fact they are young and inexperienced. Teachers, counselors, and principals need to be bringing industry into the students' view to help expand their perspectives on their own futures. We need to bring in companies that hire students in their teens - grocery stores, fast food, labor - to do job fairs and to have students give motivational speeches so that students can inspire their peers to excel.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

Springfield Public Schools should focus on celebrating real, measurable success that directly impacts students—not just participation trophies or minor achievements. The ultimate celebration should be students succeeding academically, socially, and professionally after graduation.

One area worth recognizing is our partnerships with educational institutions and local for- and not-for-profits that provide students with alternative learning paths and workforce preparation. These programs give students the opportunity to gain real-world skills, a step in the right direction toward preparing them for life beyond the classroom.

Another success is the dedication of our teachers and staff, many of whom go above and beyond despite challenges like budget constraints and discipline issues in the classroom. We should celebrate and support educators who are making a tangible difference in student outcomes rather than focusing on administrative expansion that does little to improve learning.

However, I believe the biggest success we should aim for is improved academic performance. Right now, too many students are falling behind, with standardized test scores averaging a C+ and reading levels below grade expectations. Until we see significant gains in academic progress, student achievement, and workforce readiness, we should remain focused on improvement. Success isn't about looking good on paper—it's about delivering real results for students and the community.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

Please refer to the above question regarding the top three priorities.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

The recent job position cuts within Springfield Public Schools have had a direct and negative impact on the quality of education and support for both students and staff. When teachers and essential support staff are cut, classrooms become more crowded, individual student needs are harder to meet, and teachers are left overworked and under-supported. Meanwhile, administrative positions continue to grow, diverting resources away from the students and teachers who need them most.

Teachers already struggle with classroom discipline, large workloads, and a lack of support, and these cuts have only made those issues worse. Fewer support staff means fewer counselors, interventionists, and specialists, all of whom play a vital role in helping students who are struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. This creates a ripple effect—when students don't get the help they need, teachers are left managing more challenges alone, which can lead to burnout and higher turnover rates.

Additionally, when positions are cut without a strategic plan to streamline spending and refocus resources on student outcomes, we end up with a district that is spending too much —about $20,000 per student—yet still delivering below-average results in standardized testing and literacy rates. Instead of cutting essential positions, we need to take a hard look at top-heavy administrative spending and reallocate funds to directly support students and teachers and staff. We must evaluate the quality

of the programs currently in place. I am in favor of scalpel-style adjustments, not machete-style where at all possible while prioritizing teacher and staff retention. Education should be about ensuring students are learning, not expanding bureaucracy. If we want to see real progress, we must prioritize teachers and student-focused programs, not more administrative roles that do little to improve the classroom experience.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

Fostering open and effective communication within Springfield Public Schools requires a commitment to transparency, accessibility, and collaboration. Too often, teachers, staff, parents, and community stakeholders feel unheard when decisions are made that directly impact them. To build a stronger district, we must bridge that gap by ensuring two-way communication is not only encouraged but acted upon.

One way to achieve this is through regular listening sessions, such as town halls, forums, and teacher roundtables, where faculty, staff, and parents can voice concerns and provide input directly to the school board and administration. These sessions should be structured for real dialogue, not just one-way presentations. Additionally, teachers and staff need a direct and confidential way to share concerns, ideas, and feedback without fear of retaliation. Implementing an advisory panel or anonymous feedback system would allow for candid discussions and help decision-makers stay informed on real classroom challenges.

Parental and community involvement is also essential. Schools do not operate in a vacuum, and our community partnerships ensure that students have more opportunities for learning and career readiness. Parents should also have a clearer voice in decisions that affect their children, from curriculum choices to discipline policies.

Equally important is increased transparency from district leadership. The school board and administration should communicate clearly and proactively about major decisions, budget allocations, and district challenges. Instead of reactionary communication after decisions are made, stakeholders should be involved earlier in the process to build trust and accountability. Strong communication throughout the district fosters a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, allowing all involved to contribute meaningfully to the educational experience.

At the end of the day, strong schools are built on strong communication. When faculty, staff, parents, and community members are given a true voice in the district, we can create policies that serve our students effectively and ensure SPS is competing and excelling rather than just maintaining the status quo.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

I would collaborate by promoting an open-door policy, and showing myself to be the advocate for the teachers they need me to be. I would come alongside teacher organizations in the same way I would for any stakeholders as described above.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I am very passionate about the projects I take on. As a father of an SPS student, I have an even greater vested interest in the success of our schools. However, as previously stated, parents and, in many ways, teachers are not being heard or their thoughts and concerns considered in ways I believe would improve District success.

For brevity, I will address these topics in a list.

I would most certainly be open to discussing annualizing hourly employees. I think there are ways to improve pay for certain staff, while keeping retention and budgetary concerns top-of-mind.

I have already spoken to many about the idea of redrawing school boundaries. That will be a topic that requires the input of many stakeholders, but I am willing to venture down that road.

Before cutting any non-administrative staff, a careful combing through the budget needs to occur. Student success and advancement should be the lens by which we look at any cuts or keeps to budget line items.

I really am encouraged by the implementation of the Launch Virtual Learning as an alternative for students. I have spoken to Launch teachers, and they love the program. I think this is a great way to be competitive with private and charter schools.

I believe that the classroom is the teacher's domain. As long as that teacher is teaching within the bounds of the curriculum, they should have age-appropriate creative license as to how that curriculum gets relayed to the student. That said, teachers should feel encouraged to include parents in the education of their children. It is parents, after all, who raise and teach their children outside of the classroom, and they need to be working in conjunction with teachers.

I appreciated the formation of a committee to investigate improvements and adjustments to the curriculum that was presented to the Board in November. However, it takes time for teachers to adjust to changes just like anyone else. To my knowledge, the curriculum has now changed twice in the last ten years. I wonder where teaks would have worked better than full on cuts. I would like to know who was involved in the committee, how many there were, their years of teaching wisdom and experience, and what input other teachers not on the committee had in the changes suggested to the Board.

Before the taxpayers are asked for more of their hard-earned dollars, and thousands of dollars spent on asking through the ballot process, there must be a fine-tuning of the budget.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address your questions and concerns. I hope in these responses that I have gained your support.

2025 Springfield School Board Candidate Survey Responses

Prepared by Springfield MSTA

Written Responses Submitted Directly by the Candidates
Kelly Byrne, Gail Smart, Sarah Hough and Dave Myers.

No Edits, Alterations, Substitutions, or Omissions Were Made to Candidate Responses

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Kelly Byrne (Incumbent)

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

Education: B.S. Business Marketing St Cloud State University; 2003 Kickapoo Graduate. 2003 Class 5 Basketball State Champions. Academic-All State Honors.

Career Summary: Pivot Management and the Say You Can Companies: Local business owner since 2009. Real estate investments and development. Senior Housing, Student Housing, multi-family, single family, Industrial outdoor storage.

Civic Activities. Ozarks Regional YMCA Board of Directors. Current SPS Boardmember. Youth Sports Coach. Former SPS Substitute Teacher (no longer allowed by board policy). Attend Life.Church. Past Disney PTA. Cherokee PTA. Foster failed rescue dog with 4 The Love of K9's (Dude). Financial support for Care To Learn, YMCA, First Priority, Worldserve, Field to Court, Life.Church, Big Brothers.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

I decided to run 4 years ago as a local business owner and SPS parent, who noticed the 15 or so year decline in academic performance in SPS. State assessment scores had declined as compared to prior years as well as compared to the state average consistently over that time. When I looked into the board of education I was surprised there weren't more leaders from the robust Springfield business community serving in that capacity to ensure a healthy and highly functioning district. I was also surprised to see how little discussion there was on issues and how almost every vote was 7-0.

Now, after 3 years of service, I'm seeking my second term. For the first time in about 2 decades we've recorded consecutive years of growth on state assessment scores. We're nowhere near where we need to be, but I'm encouraged that a small positive trend is showing after so many years of decline.

I'm running again because I'm the only SPS parent on the board. I'm running because business leadership is greatly needed on this board at this time. We're in the middle of 4 years of budget reductions and we need to cut $15MM out of the budget over the next two years. We're completing a $220MM bond over the next several years and another bond proposal will be brought forward before that one is finished. Board service is far less about a board member's opinions on how or what to teach students, and mostly about business matters. As a business owner and developer, I start with an idea,

then spend years navigating hurdles in the form of finance, bureaucratic restrictions and approvals, construction, law, engineering, design, and Human Resources, to turn that idea into a place that people will want to spend most of their income on to call home. I cannot think of a better background of experience for school board service. I've learned how to delegate professionals to do their job, and to listen to them, then make decisions based on their advice that will have very real consequences to me, my family, my partners, and my employees, if I don't get it right. 15 years of experience doing this has well-prepared me to listen to educators, attorneys, admins, union representation, and stakeholders, to weigh through the mountains of information and opinions, to arrive at the best decisions for the mission of the district.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

No I have not. I'm currently working on personal endorsements from stakeholders and have around 40 people committed so far, but we are early in the process.
I took part in the United Springfield PAC interview because I will speak with anyone and be open and honest about my positions. That group's stated mission is focused on growing community partnerships. They are very open about their interests in candidates that will create partnerships between SPS and other organizations such as Cox, MSU, OTC, city government, etc... This is what I would consider a "special interest" group. I know many of the people in that group have good intentions, but my priority is not community partnerships. It's to promote the mission of SPS which is, "SPS is committed to the well-being of each student by providing high-quality academic opportunities."

I will not let other interests come before the mission of the district as a boardmember. I suspect one of the primary reasons they did not endorse me was due to my vote against the Alliance for Healthcare, a partnership with Cox and OTC, which they are very proud of. I stand by that vote, and did so in my interview with them, as I saw it as in conflict with the mission of SPS.

That program was proposed to us at a cost of $1,000,000 annually and it was only to benefit 100 students. In a time that we knew we had 4 years of budget reductions which would include laying off staff, I simply could not agree that adding this much expense was the right direction. Our mission is to provide high-quality academic opportunities for "each student", not for a select few. Our focus is not community partnerships unless they help us move the mission forward.

I provide this example as proof that I am focused on the mission of the district and have not and will not let special interests get in the way of what is most important for SPS. Sometimes people get caught up in making a splash, or being the first in the state or country to do something. That's about them and their own ego. We need to do what's best for our district and our students, and it's not always about what we want. It's about what our students need.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

As a member of the board of education the mission and vision of SPS drive my decision making. The Mission of the district is "SPS is committed to the well-being of each student by providing high-quality academic opportunities."

I'm an SPS father, and I've spent time in SPS as a substitute teacher. I have a 15-year career of managing projects, budgets, operations, and employees. These experiences certainly provide a filter for how I approach fulfilling the mission of the district, and in my first term on the board of education I have a consistent track record of questioning, learning, and deciding on issues to promote "high quality academic opportunities for EACH STUDENT."

I value self-assessment, organizational improvement, and forward momentum for optimization. I strive to understand different perspectives and the whole situation prior to decision making. I believe that in my time on the board I have brought a level of accountability, intellectual honesty, and self-awareness to the board of education that hadn't been on display prior to my arrival.

Sunshine law requires us to conduct our business open to the public. For that reason, many current and past board members have been reluctant or flat unwilling to have frank conversations in the board meetings. Due to sunshine law, if it's not happening in the board meetings then it's simply not happening. I'm aware that sometimes my questions or comments appear direct or harsh, and that can be unnerving to people who aren't used to being questioned or being provided corrective criticism. Unfortunately, due to sunshine law this is the only way we can get it done, and if we are going to do our best for SPS, we must be willing to assess ourselves critically and work on solutions publicly.

I want what's best for students. I think SPS can make many improvements, and when we make those, there will be more to make. Being honest about our deficiencies is the only way for us to be our most successful.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I appreciate this question as it's an issue that's very important to the larger education landscape. As a board member for SPS, my abilities to have an impact on this issue are very minimal. This is a question for elected office holders in Jefferson City. As board members, we can certainly advocate and try to move the needle, but in my experience, this really has very little impact on what comes out of Jefferson City. I've had conversations with many reps and senators about this topic, but I've really only tried to understand the different positions they have, and I've also provided cautionary advice to them about the possible unintended consequences that come from any education bill at the state level. At the local level we have a lot to navigate to be in compliance with the law, this is probably the biggest reason we've seen the size of the administrative staff at SPS grow to the level it's at, and expenses have grown as well.

I support local control consistently and vocally. I think SPS knows what's best for SPS and that may be different than any other district in the state. We have school board elections every single May. The more the control is local, the more power the stakeholders have in directing the course of the district they live in by voting for board members who reflect their values.

I support a strong SPS. It's vital to our community. I think more local control will lead to a stronger SPS. For this reason I haven't supported vouchers or sweeping education reform at the state level. Most importantly however, this is not a question for local board members. What's most important for local board members is to focus on what's in their control. It's most important to know that local board members are committed to the mission of the district and making SPS the best version of itself it can be. I have a track record of doing just that.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

I will address the 3 biggest issues facing SPS through the lens of impact on student learning and achievement.

1) Student behaviors and teacher recruitment and retention: This is not unique to SPS and is not caused by SPS but nonetheless it's a challenge we must meet or student success will continue to be greatly impacted. We have about 700 K-5 teachers in SPS and in the last 4 years 400 of them have turned over. Teachers are making more money than they ever have (I've voted for teacher raises every year) and we remain the highest compensated district in the area and well above state averages. They're leaving because of what the job has become, and the primary reason is the out-of-control student behaviors. Our superintendent has cracked down on teachers and raised expectations in the district. But as one SPS teacher told me, "It feels like more and more is being expected of us and meanwhile the students can do whatever they want with no consequences." That's a recipe to lose good teachers. Teachers need to know that there will be higher expectations of everyone: teachers, admins, students, board members, and parents. We can't put it all on the teachers.

As many veteran teachers have retired they've been replaced with young teachers who haven't fully developed classroom management skills to the extent that many of today's behaviorally challenged classrooms require. Our teachers must be equipped to manage classroom behaviors, and they need the full support of the administration to ensure there will be progressive consequences of action if a student refuses to follow the rules. I have consistently pushed for stronger and more consistent discipline policies as a board member and have not seen this done yet to the extent that is necessary. No, I don't support paddling, like fellow board member Steve Makoski suggested, but I would support more alternative settings and more admin support to teachers through enforcement of the student handbook. The rules are there, they're just too often bent or appropriate consequences aren't being enforced.

Additionally, student cell phone use is very much a problem in our schools, and it needs to be eliminated. I pushed last summer to create a board policy that reflected the language in our student handbook and although all 7 board members agreed that it was a problem that needed fixed, 4 declined to approve a policy that would have brought needed board-level support to the issue. Our current procedures are not working. Cell phones continue to be used throughout the day in many middle schools and especially high schools. There is no need to "ban" them from the buildings or to supply Yonder bags (But if this is the preferred route by staff I would certainly be open to it). The use of cell phones during the school day simply should not be allowed in either the student handbook or by board policy, and that rule should be enforced with progressive consequences until the behavior is corrected. This would not impact the budget and could be fully implemented in a quarter or semester and would be the one of the fastest, cheapest ways we could impact student behavior, student achievement, and teacher retention.

One of the reasons I support this as a policy is that it would be uniform throughout the district and everyone: parents, students, teachers, admins, superintendent, and the board of education would understand the simple rules. This would make it easier on teachers to not have to navigate which parts of the school or what part of the day they are allowed. Everyone would know they are not allowed to be used during the school day and everyone would know the consequences. Without a uniform policy

that's simple and clear, it will continue to be a burden on the teachers to manage, also, with a complicated set of rules that allow the use for many situations, times, and places, it will overburden teachers and reduce learning time for them to try to manage.

2) Budget and Bond.

We're in our second of four consecutive years of budgeted deficit spending. $15MM more needs to be cut from our budget in the next two years. With about 80% of our spending going to salaries and benefits there is no other way to address this without cuts to staff.

Staff cuts have happened and will continue for the next two years. It's projected we will stabilize beyond that, that attendance will remain flat, but if the projections are wrong, and I certainly have my doubts about the boundary and demographic study, we could be in for more cuts. The only way to ensure we see at least flat attendance or rising attendance, in my point of view, is if student academic performance rises, and that gives rise to better perceptions of SPS.

Every board member and candidate will say they support teacher raises. That's easy to say. At this time, the only way to ensure it will happen is with fiscal responsibility, and where the rubber meets the road is in the budget. We must protect our revenues and expenditures. Now is not the time to add special programs and projects to the budget, or to grow off-site administrative staff. We can't grow special programs that only affect a few students to the tune of millions per year while simultaneously laying off teachers. Our resources must be focused on the classroom in a way that allows all students to receive a robust K-12 education. Every candidate will say they fully support teacher pay raises. No other candidate or sitting board member can more firmly say they have done that while also making the hard but necessary decisions to be a budget hawk to ensure we can afford to do so.

We're currently in the middle of a $220MM bond to rebuild Pipkin and Reed, to remodel or rebuild Pershing, and to add safety improvements across the district. It's important that we deliver on our promises and don't overspend on any of those projects so that we can move down the list to the next of many projects that are needed. Another bond will be proposed in 3 or so years. For that one to be successful, the current one must be successful. As we spend somewhere in the neighborhood of $500MM in the next 5 years it's important that we're responsible to the taxpayers in ensuring that those funds go toward buildings that are focused on what the students need, and not what the adults want. I've served as a board representative during the bond process to ensure that the process is sound and responsible to lead to the best possible results for education. The buildings we're designing are efficient and effective, yet still something to be proud of, and this is an improvement over some of the mistakes in the past, most notably Jarrett where money was spent in many ways that had no impact on education. If I'm not re-elected we will have no one on the board with any kind of construction experience to help the other board members navigate the bonds.

3) Superintendent.

Hiring and managing the superintendent is the most important responsibility of the board of education. The success of the district depends on the competency and effectiveness of its leader. It's a very tough job at a very tough time.

I'll preface this next statement by saying it's not based on any specific knowledge. It's possible or maybe even likely that the winners of this election will take part in selecting a new superintendent. I have no idea how long Dr. Lathan intends to stay with SPS. This is not a conversation that the board has had with her and wouldn't be appropriate. I do know that it's a very tough job and it consumes her

life. She works far beyond a 40-hour week, well into her nights and weekends. Superintendents often only stick around 5-7 years, and at some point it will just make sense for her to retire and enjoy life or do something less demanding and she would have plenty of opportunities to do that. When that time comes, selecting a new superintendent will pave the way for the next 5-7 years.

We must have a board that understands its role. While it's not our job to meddle in the day to day operations of the district, it is our job to manage the superintendent, and to hold her accountable if a direction gets off course. We do that through policy and through accountability with her review and contract. The current makeup of our board has 4 members who have never, in my 3 years on the board, voted against a superintendent recommendation or disagreed with her publicly, even if they do so privately. It's vital for the health of the district and the best interests of the stakeholders that we have full transparency, intellectually honest conversations, and accountability in practice in the boardroom. I have consistently done this in my first term on the board, and it's crucially important that we continue to elect board members who will also do this and not see themselves as a wall of support around the superintendent. Sometimes we will disagree. That's ok. If we don't, something is wrong.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

For the first time in a couple decades we have consecutive years of growth on assessment scores and our APR has grown each of the last 3 years. This is very encouraging, and I think there is more we can do to continue that momentum.

We've shortened the curriculum adoption cycle and implemented many changes in this area. I think we are better positioned, and it's time to pump the brakes on so much change that causes teachers to relearn new systems and approaches. The teachers need time to fully master new curriculum and the (yet again) new universal screener.

Choice programs offer something unique to SPS than can help fulfill its vision to be the "District of Choice." I believe we have some great programs. My daughter attended AOE and I was able to witness firsthand how great that program is, but as with anything balance is important. My fear with these programs is that they are not equitable or accessible for many families in the district since transportation is not provided, and the students in these programs cost more to the district which causes an unequitable financial strain that can negatively impact our ability to provide "high-quality academic opportunities for EACH STUDENT." At this time of budget cuts, we should not be looking to grow these programs, but the ones we have we should be proud of.

The bond and construction process is improved, and I believe we are building more financially responsible buildings as a result. These facilities are still great buildings that the local communities should be proud of and they are more focused on what students need to be successful.

A reduced dependence on Chromebooks for learning is positive for the young minds we are teaching, and I'd like to see us improve on the programming that teaches students HOW to use technology proficiently.

We continue to be the highest compensated district in the area as compared with other districts that we are competing against for quality teachers.

We have a healthy fund balance and have been able to catch up on many capital fund projects that had been ignored or deferred in the past.

We have a superintendent who is highly focused on literacy and who has implemented many programs to ensure we are improving in this area.

We have many great staff members who do amazing things on a daily basis by going above and beyond to meet student needs. These should be highlighted.

The unified communication platform between the classroom and the home is a great start in response to my consistent push for better communication at the classroom level, and not just a focus on communications at the district level. I think there is more to do, but this is a good stat.

The comprehensive technology plan was a great opportunity for SPS to be leaders in the state by making a transparent commitment to what our intentions are in applying technology to learning and to ensuring students are being trained on how to be fluent with the use of technology. I think it's important that we be intentional about technology and transparent about our goals with the stakeholders.

The districts new strategic plan that I helped guide and adopt in my first term is a great improvement on refocusing SPS on Academic Achievement, as the administration had gotten a little distracted over the years prior.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

I'll be short on this response as I believe my response to the question "What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?" covers it.

Student behaviors, and their impact on student learning and teacher retention.

- Budget cuts
- Bonds
- Teacher turnover
- Climate and Culture
- Appropriate balance of technology and screen time
- Cell phone use, particularly in high schools and some middle schools and teachers not having the ability to control the issue without sacrificing learning time.
- Social/Political issues driving wedges between teachers and parents
- Rifts between teachers and admin
- 3-Tiered start times
- Closing smaller schools in an effort to gain efficiencies but at the cost of a true sense of community.
- State and Federal laws and mandates that conflict with local control and what's in SPS best interest.
- HR and operations
- A very obvious and public division between the largest teacher group (SNEA) and the administration.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

Every candidate and board member will say they support teachers, keeping teachers, and providing raises. Those words don't mean anything if we aren't protecting the entire budget from unnecessary costs. No board member has been more aware of this than I have. The largest example to point to, which I've already mentioned, was the vote on the Alliance for Healthcare which added $1,000,000 to the operations budget during a time we knew staff were going to be laid off for the next 4 years.

Any decisions that cause our student to teacher ratios to climb negatively impact the quality of education. We must protect that.

We have lost 1500 students since 2019 and haven't gained them back. This has caused our state funding to be decreased. That's just how it works. If we have less students, then we shouldn't need as much resources to educated those students, so cutbacks are necessary. I for one, am keenly focused on student to teacher ratios and making sure those cutbacks impact the classroom level the least.

So as every candidate will undoubtedly say they stand with teachers, raises, and no cutbacks I hope that my track record for actually making the hard decisions stands out.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

I have consistently advocated for greater transparency and communication at SPS. I don't believe this lies in a new logo, or more texts and emails from the SPS communication department. I believe that true impactful improvements lie in the classroom level. Teachers are having a harder time than ever with challenging parents and students who second guess everything they do. This is a larger cultural issue that has come from a divided national political landscape as well as effects of social media.

I believe we need to be more personal. When parents know their student's teachers beyond a name or email communication, more trust can be formed and this will reduce the us vs. them mentality that has really grown.

I've always maintained an open line of communication with anyone who would like to talk. I meet in person when I can. I ensure their email concerns have been addressed.

I have concerns that when the administration has done surveys or committees in the past they haven't given their best effort to addressing concerns or suggestions raised but use these methods conveniently and selectively to support preconceived ideas. I try to make sure that feedback is valued and acted on when necessary including the district's climate and culture survey from 2024 that I believe was largely ignored.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

MSTA has endorsed me in the past and SNEA has not. Regardless, I have collaborated with teacher groups to hear their concerns about any issues. I am certainly one of the most communicative current board members with teacher groups.

MSTA has not reached out to me very often with concerns, but I would certainly prioritize that and make sure we get a call or meeting scheduled. SNEA has been very communicative from time to time on a wide range of issues including climate and culture, school safety, nutrition, SRO officers, teacher cutbacks, student behaviors, school closings, annualized pay, and other issues. I've always been collaborative in ensuring that I hear their concerns and where appropriate address that with the superintendent or use that information to help guide my decisions. I would encourage the MSTA to reach out at any time there is an issue of concern.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I think I've touched on several of these topics already, but I will add some comments on ones that I have not.

Annualized pay: When this issue first arose, I worked with the SNEA to schedule a zoom call to hear out many hourly workers on this issue. Probably 20 or so participated. It was helpful to me to hear their concerns and apply that to my position. I have advocated for reinstituting annualized pay because I believe it's something we can do, many staff members want it, and it would be of benefit to the district in hiring and retaining staff. I do not believe this issue is dead and I continue to work toward bringing it back.

School Boundaries: This is overdue and necessary for success. I have great concerns that the boundary and demographic study was accurate and I've expressed my concerns that we make any changes as a result of that study. This resulted in a revised recommendation that addressed a few current and pressing needs while we took the time to further research and form a committee to understand the middle school boundaries. I think we need a second opinion on that study.

SRO Positions: After the SRO SNEA rep spoke to the board I immediately scheduled a meeting with him and had a follow up conversation with Grenita. We cannot be reducing SRO officers. Grenita assured me that we were only eliminating 2 positions, not employees, that had remained unfilled for quite some time due to a lack of being able to find qualified poeple to fill them. This was an effort to create a more accurate budget. I told her my concern was that if we eliminated the positions we would stop searching for new candidates to hire new officers. I would only support this if she could ensure that we would continue to search for more officers. She agreed and said if they were found, it would come back to the board as a budget amendment to hire them. The next day the jobs were reposted on the website. As a result of my conversations on this issue it seems clear to me that we need to better position ourselves to recruit qualified candidates for these positions. I think our recruiting strategies need to be improved and we also need to consider what it will take to convince law enforcement individuals to come over to be an SRO.

Librarians: I've been working on this issue to ensure we don't make a decision that will negatively impact literacy in our schools. I, and other board members, have urged Grenita to look elsewhere for cuts.

Teacher Autonomy: I, and other board members, have urged Grenita to maintain teacher autonomy and creativity as she is simultaneously trying to raise the standards in SPS.

Curriculum Adoption: I've been in support of adopting new curriculum in several areas to ensure teachers have the proper resources to be most effective. I think it's important that we maintain flexibility in our resources that provide both digital and physical options, as I believe we got too dependent on digital only. At this time, I think we've made some necessary changes and need to pause these new systems so that teachers have the ability to learn them without so much time spent on professional learning and so much time lost to adapting to new systems, methods, and processes.

BOE actions: I was disheartened that our board almost unanimously agreed that cell phones are a concern in our district and we needed to do something about it, then 4 board members neglected to vote for a policy that reflected our student handbook language.

I think our board missed the mark on the vote for the Alliance for Healthcare for the reasons I mentioned previously.

I think our board needs to act on annualized pay.

I think Grenita responds well to a board that has a clear majority direction, and our board needs to act more swiftly and decisively on many issues, and Grenita will respond. I think we could find common ground on discipline and cell phones for sure.

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Gail Smart

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

I practiced law in Radcliffe, Kentucky and was the administrator of the county public defender system during that time. I was part of a firm where we handled civil and criminal matters. After moving to Springfield, and while raising my two sons, I focused on volunteering in my sons' schools, which led to me becoming a wider community volunteer and public school advocate in the Springfield community.

For over 30 years, I have been engaged and involved in our public schools or in our community all that time. While my sons attended SPS, I was heavily involved in the PTA, often serving as an officer. I was the co-director for 8 years of the Well of Life food pantry in which eight downtown churches served those in need in the 65806 zip code area. I served on the SPS Foundation Board in its early years. I was a committee chair on the Every Child Promise initiative. I co-chaired the Poverty Commission for its two year mission and currently serve on the Community Foundation for the Ozarks Board of Directors. I was a founding member of the Advancing Women PAC that is focused at elevating women in elected leadership roles.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

Springfield has been my home for over 30 years, and I care that it remains a thriving city where all have a chance to succeed. A healthy public education system is a critical component of its continued vibrancy. I am running because I want to make sure every student has a chance to be successful while they are in school and beyond graduation. The public in public school means everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or any other special need is provided free and equal access to an education.

Striving to be a school board member isn't about me. It's about elevating the voices of others–parents, guardians, students, educators, and staff to ensure they have the resources needed to succeed.

Advocating for and supporting public education have always been very important to me. Both of my sons graduated from SPS and while they were in school, I was very involved in the PTA at Sunshine, Jarrett, and Parkview often serving as an officer and was president of their athletic booster clubs.

I also care about education because my family has a history of working in public education. My husband, Clif Smart, was president of Missouri State University, my mother-in-law was a long time high school English teacher, and my oldest son, Murray, taught for three years in Rogers, Arkansas. It's personal. I understand why teachers and staff need board members who are looking out for their best interests, and I will do just that.

My love for students and helping change directions through quality public education is really what motivates me to serve. While I believe the district is making improvements, I would like to help it be better. Public education is facing many challenges, and I want to be a part of ensuring our schools in Springfield are strong and thriving. I believe I bring a positive, steady, trusted voice to the board table. At this season of life–I'll be able to fully dedicate my all to service on the board.
When I was a practicing attorney, I represented clients who possessed a variety of legal needs, and I was the administrator of the county public defender system. My ability and training to review contracts, understand legal risks, and ensure policies and regulations are met will be an asset. I know how to listen, reflect, and determine an appropriate course of action. This experience also offered invaluable lessons on getting along with many different personalities, and it taught me the importance of empathy and compassion for others.

I care about our community and have been a fierce community advocate for those struggling to be successful. I served as co-director of the Well of Life food pantry for eight years where I oversaw the day-to-day operations of the pantry, helped craft budgets built on donations from eight downtown churches and the community, and served for several years on the board as board president. In short, I know how to mobilize a community organization, budget accordingly, and get things done.

I co-chaired the local Poverty Commission for two years. We brought together city officials, university professors, community leaders, members of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, and others to collectively learn about root causes and assess best practices to address the growing, but at that time, largely ignored issue of poverty in Springfield. We set a vision, measurable goals, and strategies to move toward reducing the poverty rate. Because of the work of this commission and the programs it launched, the poverty rate in Springfield has declined according to local data.

I proudly served on the SPS Foundation Board for a number of years. Serving on this board helped me become familiar with the needs of teachers and the importance of raising private money. I also got a first hand look at how committed teachers are to making their classrooms the best they could be by taking their time to research and submit grant requests.

I am in my fifth year serving on the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and am on the executive board as secretary. The board currently oversees a $500,000,000 budget. Being a part of budget workshops and budget strategy sessions has enabled me to make informed decisions that align with the Foundation's goals. I'm committed to bringing that same diligence to the SPS budget priorities. I am fiscally conservative and understand the importance of public trust and transparency. I will support a budget that seeks to support the goals of the organization. In the case of Springfield Public Schools, the adopted budget must support academic achievement and employee retention. Additionally, I have experience in helping provide input into and approving CFO's strategic plan, leading during the search process for a nation-wide search for the organization's next president, and working to hold the new president accountable to those goals. These factors prepare me to be a school board member.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

I have received the endorsement of United Springfield. United Springfield is a non-partisan Political Action Committee that supports individuals who share their mission to unite our children, citizens, and community. And, I have received an endorsement from Advance. I was a founding member of this PAC dedicated to recruiting and supporting women running for partisan and nonpartisan offices in Southwest Missouri.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

Transparency, honesty, respect for others, empathy, service, accountability, humility, kindness, and practicality are just some of the values that guide my decision making. Making sure I am true to myself and adhere to my personal values when working with others builds trust and respect. I believe you must genuinely value each person's contribution and what they bring to the discussion.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

This is probably not something the school board is going to determine. These decisions will be set at the state and federal level. As a school board, we will have little to say regarding this issue. Even so, I will work with our local legislators and educate myself regarding state legislations that will advocate for public schools over vouchers or charter schools. I will support local bond measures and school funding initiatives. I will also always be an advocate for students who are struggling to ensure all students receive a quality education.

If you are asking my personal opinion regarding school vouchers, this is not a good use of taxpayer dollars. It will take money away from public schools and strip them of resources necessary to have cutting edge support and programs and the resources to help students.

Vouchers for private schools and charter schools also take away from the limited pool of educators to select from each year. Additionally, they take away the support of parents and families that the local school needs. Instead of strengthening their neighborhood by using their talents and treasures, the result is that the public schools are weakened.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

My priorities are as follows:

Ensuring Student Success- we must always ensure we are providing every student in every school the tools they need to succeed within our schools and after graduation. I'll collaborate with our teachers, business community, and higher education to ensure our kids have access to the resources they need to thrive throughout their time in our schools and beyond.

Investing in School Safety - safety is the foundation of success for any community, and that is especially true for schools. As I visit in the community, this is often mentioned by parents as their #1 issue of concern. Springfield has made important investments in making our schools safer for our students and educators in recent years, and I will pledge that I will work to see those investments are fully implemented. Further, I will work to ensure school safety remains a priority for future investment while I am a member of the board.

Promoting Financial Discipline - I've spent my career involved in Springfield's civic, charitable, and public organizations. Without sound financial management, the mission will always suffer. On the Springfield School Board, I'll ensure that we will make sound budget decisions with our resources that will promote school safety and student performance while protecting the long-term fiscal stability of the district. My training has taught me to ask tough questions, insist on financial accountability, and ensure budget allocations and expenditures align with the board approved strategic plan.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

I believe that SPS has a lot to celebrate and that the teachers and the district need to be cheered on. As reported in the local newspapers, the most talked about successes are the improvement in Academic Achievement, the district has increased its overall scores in math, science, and English on the Annual Performance Report for the third straight year, and graduation rates are up from 2024. Teachers have mentioned successes such as our small neighborhood elementary schools in our district. Teachers in small neighborhood elementary schools have the advantage of being better connected to their students (often smaller class sizes) and their parents or guardians. Another success teachers have mentioned is the Step Up mentoring program that the district requires for all first and second year teachers. Teacher mentorship is another important tool for recruiting and retaining teachers. Having a mentorship program such as Step Up, shows the district is focused on "passing the torch" to a new generation of educators while communicating to new teachers they are respected and valued. The district should also be celebrating all of the new collaborations with stakeholders: SPS University, Superintendent Solutions, Gather with Granita, Principal for a Day, SPS Ambassadors, to name a few.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

While there are many challenges facing SPS, I would like to talk about the following three.

Safety is a multi-layered issue. It encompasses threats to both students and educators from outside and inside the building. Student behavior and discipline continue to be an issue, more prevalent since the pandemic, and administrators, educators, and families must have the resources to address these concerns. Last year, school resource officers responded to 4700 calls for service, up from previous year. There were 571 assaults reported, more than double from the year before and 55 weapon calls. This does not seem to be the time to lose any school resource officers due to budget cuts. Fostering a positive climate often begins with teachers feeling safe in their classrooms and having discipline strategies that work. I would also encourage close and consistent monitoring of practices and procedures for student use of cell phones during the school day. While behavior is not the only reason people leave the profession, it is a deciding factor for far too many.

SPS is focused on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports to address discipline issues. PBIS encourages proactive approaches, rewarding positive behaviors, and offers support for students who

struggle. Effective discipline teaches students respect, responsibility, and accountability. I agree there needs to be a balance with fairness and support for students who face emotional or behavioral challenges. But, students who continually struggle to follow directions or who are violent should be moved to an alternative program/site offered by the district.

The 2023 bond issue included about $7 million for specific safety improvements. Last year SPS hired an outside firm to audit its safety measures, i.e. safety training, emergency procedures and identify safety needs in all its buildings. The district received high marks for its training and emergency procedures, camera coverage, and the visitor check-in system. I will continue to champion these needed efforts.

Teacher retention is a big concern. Research shows high-quality teachers are the number one factor contributing to student success. There are multiple ways to approach this issue. Raising educators' salaries is an important strategy to ease the staffing shortage, but it is not the only answer.

SPS should prioritize strengthening its relationship with the three Springfield universities, all having robust educator preparation programs. In 2021, MSU and SPS signed an agreement to create a Future Educator Program. This "Grow Your Own" program is a districtwide initiative that identifies under-resourced high school juniors, seniors, and college students, as well as non-certified school staff who want to become educators. Graduates commit to teaching in SPS once they complete the program. The state of Missouri's fiscal year 2024 budget included funding for this program. We must continue to recruit teachers that are educated in strong teacher preparation programs.

Supporting teacher professional development is critical. This is a way for them to continue to grow professionally, and I would support various learning opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and mentoring to help teachers maximize effectiveness in their classrooms.

Declining revenue is likely on the horizon as Missouri continues to reduce state taxes and federal ESSER dollars conclude. The district may not be able to count on significant new money to fund increasing teacher and staff salaries, starting new programs, or hiring additional employees. As a result, the board will have to work with the superintendent to prioritize critical initiatives to fund and reallocate money to those priorities by reducing spending elsewhere. My established relationships working with our local representatives in the legislature–Melanie Stinnett, Lincoln Hough, Curtis Trent, John Black, Alex Riley, Stephanie Hein, Betsy Fogle, and Jeremy Dean– will help me advocate for policies, laws, and funding in favor of public education.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

High quality teachers are the number one factor contributing to student success. Raising teachers' salaries is an important strategy to ease the staffing shortage, but that strategy alone is unlikely to be successful or yield the desired results.

Not only do we need to listen and respond to what teachers need, but we also need to celebrate and recognize the incredible work they are doing each and every day. Employee engagement increases when one's talents and contributions are recognized and appreciated. It causes individuals to want to stay. While our focus is always on student success, as a board member, I am also a trustee to ensure

our nearly 4000 employees—teachers and staff– have a healthy work environment. I will champion policies that reflect that support.

Recruiting and training more paraprofessionals to support and ease the burdens of teachers in the classrooms is one way to retain high-quality teachers. There are currently thirty-one paraprofessional jobs open in Springfield. A paraprofessional or instructional aide can help manage the classroom or help a student who needs more guidance or instruction. This extra help can make a big difference to a student's learning experience as well as help a teacher.

As stated earlier in the above question, declining revenue is likely on the horizon as Missouri continues to reduce state taxes and federal ESSER dollars conclude. The district may not be able to count on significant new money to fund increasing teacher and staff salaries, starting new programs, or hiring additional employees. As a result, the board will have to work with the superintendent to prioritize critical initiatives to fund and reallocate money to those priorities by reducing spending elsewhere. My experience working on not-for-profit boards with limited funding and my established relationships working with our local representatives in the in the legislature will help me advocate for policies, laws, and funding in favor of public education.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

I will attend workshops, study sessions, and board meetings and stay in communication with the superintendent as well as other board members. I have the time and welcome meetings to collaborate with stakeholder groups-whether that be the PTA, MSTA, SNEA, Teamsters, community members, etc. I would expect the superintendent and administration to do the same. I am curious and I will enjoy asking questions to learn so I can be well advised. More importantly, I believe those directly impacted by current and future decisions should be involved in the collaborative partnership with the district from the beginning, not hearing about decisions without input.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

Effective communication and collaboration between board members and teacher organizations is essential. Transparency is essential. Teacher organizations should feel comfortable sharing concerns, ideas, and feedback. I would encourage regular communication or monthly reports and updates throughout the school year.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

Student Behavior -
We must look at strategies and use practices aimed at maintaining order, promoting positive behavior, and ensuring a safe and quality learning environment. SPS is currently implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in all its buildings. This strategy focuses on proactive approaches and rewards positive behavior.

Effective discipline teaches students respect, responsibility, and accountability. I believe there needs to be a balance with fairness and support for students who face emotional or behavioral challenges. But, students who continually struggle to follow directions or who are violent should be moved to an alternative program/site offered by the district. Providing temporary or long-term alternatives for students who repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior allows them to continue their education in a structured setting.

Balanced and inclusive approaches are vital to create fair, supportive, and effective discipline policies that consider diverse student needs and promote a positive school climate.

Annualized Pay -
I am in favor of revisiting the question of Annualized Pay. Having been the director of a local food pantry for 8 years, I understand the hardship that any change in a person's paycheck can cause. I understand that the school district's auditors and attorneys have advised that annualized pay is not a best practice and that allowing staff to choose between how they would like to be paid (hourly or annually), is not currently offered. I would want to inquire as to why staff is not able to choose how they are paid.

Resource Officers -
Student behavior and discipline continue to be an issue, more prevalent since the pandemic, and administrators, educators, and families must have the resources to address these concerns. Last year, school resource officers responded to 4700 calls for service, up from previous year. There were 571 assaults reported, more than double from the year before and 55 weapon calls. This does not seem to be the time to lose any school resource officers due to budget cuts. Fostering a positive climate often begins with teachers feeling safe in their classrooms and having discipline strategies that work. I would also encourage close and consistent monitoring of practices and procedures for student use of cell phones during the school day. While behavior is not the only reason people leave the profession, it is a deciding factor for far too many.

Teacher Autonomy --
As I've talked with teachers over the last few months, this is an issue of top concern. Feeling over-burdened by the focus on standardized testing and data collection takes time away from teaching and time away from students. Now that we know that the funding is going to be inadequate, monitoring teachers less and trusting teachers more is going to be important.

2025 Springfield School Board Candidate Survey Responses

Prepared by Springfield MSTA

Written Responses Submitted Directly by the Candidates
Kelly Byrne, Gail Smart, Sarah Hough and Dave Myers.

No Edits, Alterations, Substitutions, or Omissions Were Made to Candidate Responses

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Sarah Hough

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

Throughout my life, I have been deeply committed to public education and community service. Growing up in a family of educators, I saw firsthand the impact that strong schools have on students and communities. My father was a teacher, principal, and superintendent, and my mother worked as a speech pathologist and high school teacher. While I did not pursue a career in education, their work and a strong belief in public education inspired me to dedicate much of my civic work to supporting education.

As an SPS parent, I have children at Field Elementary and Phelps Center for the Gifted. I have been involved in the Field Elementary PTA and have volunteered in multiple classroom activities over the years. I have also been fortunate to support many SPS initiatives through my philanthropic work at Bass Pro Shops. My team developed and administers the Explore the Ozarks Grant Fund, a grant through Community Foundation of the Ozarks that supports experiential conservation education and field trips in SWMO. We have also supported the Foundation for Springfield Public Schools Foundation Back to School grants as well the SPS Back to School bash.

I have also served on several nonprofit boards, including Care to Learn, Springfield Innovation Inc., The Discovery Center, and the Downtown YMCA Advisory Board. Each of these organizations plays a vital role in supporting students, whether through meeting basic needs, providing services, enhancing STEM education, or fostering innovation. These nonprofits develop and support our youth and spark innovation in our community. Serving on these boards has given me a broad perspective on issues facing our students and community.

Finally, in 2009, I co-founded a community foundation to support my hometown school district. The foundation has funded student scholarships, capital improvements, and safety updates, ensuring that students have access to quality resources and safe learning environments.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

I am running for the Springfield Public Schools Board of Education because I believe in the transformative power of public education and the importance of strong parent representation on the

board. As a mother of two children currently enrolled in SPS, an active community leader, and a business professional, I am deeply invested in ensuring that our schools provide high-quality education and a safe learning environment for all students.

My professional background has uniquely prepared me for this role. I currently lead Community and Outfitter Engagement at Bass Pro Shops. I serve on the Senior HR Leadership team and manage a team that oversees the company's community-based philanthropy efforts, employee engagement and recognition programs, our non-profit employee foundation and other strategic initiatives that impact our Outfitters (employees).

Much like our school system, Bass Pro Shops is a complicated organization with 200+ locations and multiple segments of business spanning from retail to manufacturing. As a leader in the company, I am faced with weighing decisions that impact our 35,000+ Outfitters across the country. I am accustomed to reviewing complex issues with multiple groups of stakeholders in mind. In my role, I have to consider how decisions and new processes will impact our retail employees, managers, our customers and more. My professional experience has prepared me well to understand how issues impact our students, teachers, parents and community members and make decisions balancing multiple stakeholder interests.

Finally, as a mom of two kids in our district, I would bring a valuable parent perspective to the board. I believe my voice as a parent is especially needed, and it's something I would uniquely bring to the table. If elected, I would be the only board member whose school-aged children all attend Springfield Public Schools.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

I have received the endorsement of United Springfield, a non-partisan PAC.

I have interviewed with the Springfield Labor Council and the SNEA endorsement committees. They have not announced endorsements yet.

I was also invited to participate in an endorsement process with the Greene County Republican Central Committee. I declined to participate out of respect for the non-partisan nature of the Board of Education.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

The values that guide my decision-making as a leader are integrity, collaboration, and accountability. As a board member, I think it's important to always remember that you represent the interest of all of the SPS stakeholders - students, educators, support staff, parents and community members.

Integrity means making decisions based on what is best for students and educators, not based on politics or special interests. I believe in transparency and open communication, ensuring that our school board remains accountable to the community it serves.

Collaboration is key to creating positive change. I will work closely with educators, parents, administrators, and community leaders to ensure our district is addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities for students.

Accountability means using data-driven decision-making and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programs. The board should hold itself and the administration accountable for meeting strategic goals and improving student outcomes.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I do not support vouchers or the expansion of charter schools. I believe we should focus on strengthening our public schools to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education. Diverting funds from public schools to private institutions dilutes the already scarce resources available to the majority of students and creates inequities. Missouri is already below the median in public education funding, we can't afford to fall further behind by siphoning funds to private or charter schools that don't have the same level of accountability as public schools. Instead, I support investing in public education to improve outcomes for all students in our community.

I have followed the outcomes of the Arkansas Learns voucher program in our neighboring state. After two years, nearly 85% of the vouchers were utilized by students who were NOT in a public school the previous year. Overwhelmingly, they are seeing vouchers go to support students who were not in public schools to begin with. As a board, we must continue to follow the outcomes of these programs in other school districts and states so we understand the impact these types of programs make on public education.

As the largest school district in the state, I believe SPS leaders should be at the table advocating for funding and policies that provide more resources for public education, not less.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

Protecting students and educators - As a mom, the safety of our students and educators will always be my top priority. And as a board member, I will work to ensure our schools are equipped with the safety and discipline measures needed to provide safe learning environments. When you talk to educators, it's no secret that classroom behavior has been an issue since COVID - and that's not an issue unique to Springfield. SPS has implemented a plan, but the board needs to continue to make it a priority to ensure the plan is being implemented successfully. And if it's not, we must find other ways to address behavior so teachers can focus on teachers and students can focus on learning.

Promote student learning - I will work to ensure every student has access to a great education in the Springfield school district and that we are achieving the academic excellence that our students deserve. If you've followed the news the last few weeks, you will have seen that SPS has for the 3rd year in a row shown improvement in our attendance rates, graduation rates and in test scores. That's HUGE and we need to continue to build on that to make sure we are preparing students for success.

Focusing on student achievement also opens the door for our community to attract and retain families and businesses who are looking at the quality of the schools as factors in where to live and do business. I believe academic achievement and opportunities matter for our kids, but they matter for our community too.

Preserving tax dollars - I'll use my business experience to ensure we are spending our tax dollars wisely. Tightening budgets and increased competition for public school funding are going to continue to be issues we face. As we face difficult budget choices we must prioritize our educators and students while being innovative and transparent.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

While there is always room for improvement, Springfield Public Schools has many achievements to celebrate. Over the past three years, SPS has seen consistent improvement in test scores, graduation rates and attendance. We should recognize the effort that educators and students have invested in this growth and celebrate it.

Springfield Public Schools has also been a leader statewide in using formative assessments and data driven instruction to drive academic improvement in the district. The use of the Renaissance District Common Assessments and Common Formative Assessments will continue to provide insight into student learning and allow teachers to meet students where they are. We should be proud of the tools we have implemented to advance student outcomes.

Additionally, we should celebrate the programs to support our early career teachers including the mentorship programs in place and master teacher observations. Providing these extra supports for new educators helps aid in ensuring our new educators are supported and connected as they enter the field of education.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

There are many challenging issues facing SPS and the institution of public education, but three major challenges rise to the top for me:

Teacher Recruitment and Retention: High-quality teachers are the backbone of student success. According to research published by RAND (a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization), when determining the most important school-related factors for student performance, teachers have been found to have an impact that is two to three times greater than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, and school leadership. Because of this, I believe recruiting and retaining great teachers and support professionals must be top priority.

School Safety: The safety of students and educators should remain a top priority for all leaders in the district. We must ensure our educators and students feel safe in their learning and working environments. As a board member, I will advocate for the safety and discipline measures needed to provide safe learning environments. We must ensure we have processes and technology in place to ensure the physical safety of our buildings, buses and any place we have students and educators. We must also ensure that we are addressing discipline and behavior issues in the district consistently and effectively.

Student Achievement: Our students deserve to have the best education possible. As a school district, we must remain focused on ensuring all students meet or exceed academic benchmarks so they have every opportunity to succeed. Focusing on student achievement also opens the door for our community to attract and retain families and businesses who are looking at the quality of the schools as factors in where to live and do business.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

I am not sure we will see the full impact of the recent budget cuts until the changes are implemented. However, I have listened to staff and parents alike and agree with the concern that cuts will impact teachers and students directly via a loss of resources. I am further concerned about the Governor's recent announcement that his proposed budget does not fully fund the state's foundation formula for public education. We are going to continue to see funding for public education threatened. As a board, I believe we must approach the budget process with the best interest of students at the forefront of our decision-making. While we do not make decisions on each specific budget line, I believe the board must make clear to the administration our priorities in advance of the budget development. We must prioritize keeping as many classroom and teacher support positions as possible.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

Good communication is important for the overall engagement and morale of any organization. As a board member, I would start by listening and seeking to understand the viewpoints and needs of the multiple groups of stakeholders and sharing those viewpoints with fellow board members and administrators. I would also advocate for clear and consistent communication between the administration and all levels of stakeholders. I believe the more we seek and share feedback and give insight into how decisions are made the better we are able to engage all of the stakeholders.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

I strongly believe that teacher organizations should have a direct and open line of communication with the board and administration. Teachers are the frontline experts in our schools, and their voices must be considered when making decisions about curriculum, policies, and working conditions. Teachers should be at the table in making decisions that affect their everyday work.

I would also advocate for regular feedback mechanisms to be in place to ensure that educators input is received in an easy and straightforward way. We should operate with transparency in sharing district data, budgets and how decisions are made. That transparency should apply to teachers, parents and community members alike.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and

instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I know that as a board member, I will be faced with making a number of decisions that impact not just students and educators, but staff, parents and the community at large. I do not take that responsibility lightly. I commit to studying issues, seeking feedback and making decisions with the best interest of students.

I enjoyed visiting with MSTA in person about some of these important issues and my thoughts/decision-making processes at our meeting on Jan. 28th. I look forward to continuing to discuss the issues that impact teachers and staff more in the coming months. Please feel free to reach out to me at sarahforsps@gmail.com or via Facebook at Sarah Hough for SPS School Board.

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Prepared by Springfield MSTA

Written Responses Submitted Directly by the Candidates
Kelly Byrne, Gail Smart, Sarah Hough and Dave Myers.

No Edits, Alterations, Substitutions, or Omissions Were Made to Candidate Responses

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Dave Myers

Introduction:

Please tell us about your school and community involvement.

I was a substitute teacher for two years, one year at SPS. This allowed me to delve into the inner workings of our schools, where I engaged face-to-face with students and teachers, as well as administrators. I am deeply committed to the betterment of our community through engagement. I have been actively involved in local community improvement initiatives such as the C-Street City Market's Culture Fest where I co-hosted the event. Groups and events like this contribute to efforts that enhance the quality of life for residents. My participation in several community choirs has allowed me to use music as a means to bring people together and foster a sense of unity. Additionally, I have had the honor of serving at the Korean War Memorial during Memorial Day ceremonies for six years, paying tribute to our nation's heroes and supporting efforts to preserve their legacy. These experiences reflect my dedication to serving and uplifting our community.

What inspired you to run for the school board, and how does your personal or professional background align with this role and make you uniquely qualified?

With a strong foundation in leadership and public service, I bring a diverse and well-rounded background to the table. As a Staff Sergeant in the Army National Guard, I have honed skills in teamwork, discipline, and problem-solving. During my service in the National Guard, I was deployed as part of the COVID emergency response operations, contributing to critical efforts to safeguard public health and provide essential support to communities during a time of crisis. For my service, I was honored with a commendation medal recognizing my dedication and impact during this challenging time. My experience in local politics, including working alongside state representatives and senators, has given me valuable insights into policy-making and community advocacy. I have also served as a substitute teacher, which has provided me with firsthand experience in education and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within our schools. Additionally, I have served as a fiduciary for disabled veterans, ensuring their financial and personal well-being with integrity and care. My years as a minister of music have allowed me to connect with people on a personal level, fostering communication and collaboration within diverse groups. I also completed a Continuing Education Degree in Public Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Together, these experiences equip me with the dedication, leadership, and perspective needed to serve effectively on the school board.

Have you received endorsements from any special interest groups?

Not at this time, but I have sought them out. I have interviewed with the SNEA and United Springfield. I continue to speak to community groups when invited, but not for endorsements.

Values and Education Advocacy:

What values guide your decision-making, and how do you apply those values to leadership?

The values that guide my decision-making are integrity, service, accountability, and collaboration. These principles have been at the core of my leadership throughout my career in the military, public service, and community involvement.

Integrity means doing what is right, even when no one is watching. As a Soldier in the National Guard, I am entrusted with the well-being of my team and the success of our missions, ensuring that every action is taken with honesty and responsibility.

Service is about putting others before myself. Whether it was during my COVID emergency response deployment, my role as a fiduciary for disabled veterans, or my time as a substitute teacher, I have always prioritized the needs of those I serve, working to make a meaningful impact.

Accountability ensures that decisions are made with careful consideration and transparency. My experience in local politics and policy-making has reinforced the importance of fiscal responsibility and ethical leadership—values I will uphold on the school board.

Collaboration and communication are key to solving complex challenges. As a music minister, I learned the power of bringing people together toward a common goal. Whether working with teachers, parents, or fellow board members, I will foster an environment where all voices are heard and respected. These values shape how I lead—by actively listening, taking decisive action, and always striving to serve my community with integrity and purpose.

How might you advocate for public education versus privatized education, charter schools and school vouchers?

I believe that public education should be a pathway to opportunity for every student, not a system where only a select few thrive while others are left behind. Advocating for strong, competitive, and effective public schools means ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources, support, and quality instruction they need to succeed.

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is underperforming—we spend approximately $20,000 per student, yet our standardized test scores are averaging a C+, and many students are reading at least two grade levels below where they should be. If we want to compete with private and charter schools, we must raise the bar and ensure that our public schools provide a high-quality education that prepares students for success.

I will advocate for transparency in budgeting to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent effectively on classroom resources, teacher support, and programs that directly impact student achievement.

Additionally, we must prioritize student learning and discipline, empowering teachers to again foster an environment where students can focus and succeed. Expanding partnerships with organizations like Ozark Technical Community College and local nonprofits will also provide alternative learning pathways, ensuring that students graduate prepared for both higher education and the workforce. Public education should not be a fallback option—it should be the first and best choice for families. SPS must compete, innovate, and improve so that we don't continue losing students to alternative schooling options. I will work to make our district stronger, more accountable, and truly focused on student success.

Reflecting on Springfield Public Schools and Looking Ahead:

What do you think should be the top three priorities for our district?

o First, responsible spending is a major challenge facing our district. The pandemic brought us some additional funds, but they were not allocated wisely. Now, we are working through cutting the budget while having to lay off teachers. At the same time, the administration is trying to create a new position that will cost the district over $100k in salary and benefits. I know there are teachers who would love to get a raise, or even keep their jobs with that money. Currently, there are 136 open positions the district would not be able to afford to fund. It would be my goal to work with other board members and the superintendent in crafting affordable, common sense approaches to staffing needs and to seek ways in which current staff and faculty could possibly cross-train or to delegate duties more efficiently. We need to be creative as well as fiscally responsible.

o Second, increased disciplinary issues, and problems with cell phones in the class, go hand-in-hand. As a substitute, I experienced first-hand issues with focus and apathetic attitudes toward classwork and learning in general. We have a policy at SPS of no cell phone usage during class time, but it is not being enforced. However, I have heard of some teachers who are individually enforcing the policy, and it is working well. Students need to understand there is no alternative, and that teachers are the arbiters of order and discipline in the classroom. Importantly, I believe teachers do not feel they can stand for these and other rules, because they do not feel adequately supported by their principals and the administration. This is not acceptable. I have spoken with teachers who have said this very thing. We as a district can and should do more to empower teachers to enforce the policy directives handed down by the Board and executed by the Superintendent.

o Third, I believe the continuity between K-12 and the world of college and career - aka adulthood - is lacking and doing a disservice to the student. As parents, my wife and I tell our children it is our job to teach them how to be good adults. That is absolutely the goal of every teacher: to educate to the best of their ability in order to help make and mold students into active and productive adults in society. However, time and time again I see students who are left behind, told they don't have many options, are ignored for one reason or another, etc. It is vital that all of our students understand their own potential, but more importantly, the potential they have to thrive and succeed in the real world. Because of social media and the instant gratification of technology, the greatest goal it seems students want to strive for is to be an influencer. Not only is this market saturated, it is unlikely, statistically, that even a fraction of our students will excel in such a venture. Our regional society and our global society need well-educated students who believe in themselves and understand there are a myriad of options out there available to them. Whether through collaborative programs that benefit the student's future (and not just a select few corporations), cooperation with non- and for-profit businesses, or even increased opportunities for study-abroad programs, SPS needs to show the vastness of our great world to our

students, thereby giving them hope to see beyond the limited scope they have simply by virtue of the fact they are young and inexperienced. Teachers, counselors, and principals need to be bringing industry into the students' view to help expand their perspectives on their own futures. We need to bring in companies that hire students in their teens - grocery stores, fast food, labor - to do job fairs and to have students give motivational speeches so that students can inspire their peers to excel.

What successes do you feel the district should be celebrating?

Springfield Public Schools should focus on celebrating real, measurable success that directly impacts students—not just participation trophies or minor achievements. The ultimate celebration should be students succeeding academically, socially, and professionally after graduation.

One area worth recognizing is our partnerships with educational institutions and local for- and not-for-profits that provide students with alternative learning paths and workforce preparation. These programs give students the opportunity to gain real-world skills, a step in the right direction toward preparing them for life beyond the classroom.

Another success is the dedication of our teachers and staff, many of whom go above and beyond despite challenges like budget constraints and discipline issues in the classroom. We should celebrate and support educators who are making a tangible difference in student outcomes rather than focusing on administrative expansion that does little to improve learning.

However, I believe the biggest success we should aim for is improved academic performance. Right now, too many students are falling behind, with standardized test scores averaging a C+ and reading levels below grade expectations. Until we see significant gains in academic progress, student achievement, and workforce readiness, we should remain focused on improvement. Success isn't about looking good on paper—it's about delivering real results for students and the community.

What are the greatest challenges the district is facing?

Please refer to the above question regarding the top three priorities.

Given the recent job position cuts within the school district, how do you believe these changes have affected the quality of education and support for students and staff? How would you approach managing the budget to ensure the least impact on staffing while still addressing necessary financial adjustments?

The recent job position cuts within Springfield Public Schools have had a direct and negative impact on the quality of education and support for both students and staff. When teachers and essential support staff are cut, classrooms become more crowded, individual student needs are harder to meet, and teachers are left overworked and under-supported. Meanwhile, administrative positions continue to grow, diverting resources away from the students and teachers who need them most.

Teachers already struggle with classroom discipline, large workloads, and a lack of support, and these cuts have only made those issues worse. Fewer support staff means fewer counselors, interventionists, and specialists, all of whom play a vital role in helping students who are struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. This creates a ripple effect—when students don't get the help they need, teachers are left managing more challenges alone, which can lead to burnout and higher turnover rates.

Additionally, when positions are cut without a strategic plan to streamline spending and refocus resources on student outcomes, we end up with a district that is spending too much —about $20,000 per student—yet still delivering below-average results in standardized testing and literacy rates. Instead of cutting essential positions, we need to take a hard look at top-heavy administrative spending and reallocate funds to directly support students and teachers and staff. We must evaluate the quality of the programs currently in place. I am in favor of scalpel-style adjustments, not machete-style where at all possible while prioritizing teacher and staff retention. Education should be about ensuring students are learning, not expanding bureaucracy. If we want to see real progress, we must prioritize teachers and student-focused programs, not more administrative roles that do little to improve the classroom experience.

How would you foster communication within the district, with faculty/staff, and with stakeholders?

Fostering open and effective communication within Springfield Public Schools requires a commitment to transparency, accessibility, and collaboration. Too often, teachers, staff, parents, and community stakeholders feel unheard when decisions are made that directly impact them. To build a stronger district, we must bridge that gap by ensuring two-way communication is not only encouraged but acted upon.

One way to achieve this is through regular listening sessions, such as town halls, forums, and teacher roundtables, where faculty, staff, and parents can voice concerns and provide input directly to the school board and administration. These sessions should be structured for real dialogue, not just one-way presentations. Additionally, teachers and staff need a direct and confidential way to share concerns, ideas, and feedback without fear of retaliation. Implementing an advisory panel or anonymous feedback system would allow for candid discussions and help decision-makers stay informed on real classroom challenges.

Parental and community involvement is also essential. Schools do not operate in a vacuum, and our community partnerships ensure that students have more opportunities for learning and career readiness. Parents should also have a clearer voice in decisions that affect their children, from curriculum choices to discipline policies.

Equally important is increased transparency from district leadership. The school board and administration should communicate clearly and proactively about major decisions, budget allocations, and district challenges. Instead of reactionary communication after decisions are made, stakeholders should be involved earlier in the process to build trust and accountability. Strong communication throughout the district fosters a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, allowing all involved to contribute meaningfully to the educational experience.

At the end of the day, strong schools are built on strong communication. When faculty, staff, parents, and community members are given a true voice in the district, we can create policies that serve our students effectively and ensure SPS is competing and excelling rather than just maintaining the status quo.

As a school board member, how do you intend to work and collaborate with the teacher organizations?

I would collaborate by promoting an open-door policy, and showing myself to be the advocate for the teachers they need me to be. I would come alongside teacher organizations in the same way I would for any stakeholders as described above.

Other Information:

What else would you like us to know about you and your desire to serve on the SPS Board of Education? Please consider discussing current district topics such as student behavior, annualized pay for hourly employees, redrawing of school boundaries, reduction in the number of resource officers and librarians and instructional coaches, teacher autonomy, curriculum adoptions, Board of Education actions, district bonds/levies, etc.

I am very passionate about the projects I take on. As a father of an SPS student, I have an even greater vested interest in the success of our schools. However, as previously stated, parents and, in many ways, teachers are not being heard or their thoughts and concerns considered in ways I believe would improve District success.

For brevity, I will address these topics in a list.

I would most certainly be open to discussing annualizing hourly employees. I think there are ways to improve pay for certain staff, while keeping retention and budgetary concerns top-of-mind.

I have already spoken to many about the idea of redrawing school boundaries. That will be a topic that requires the input of many stakeholders, but I am willing to venture down that road.

Before cutting any non-administrative staff, a careful combing through the budget needs to occur. Student success and advancement should be the lens by which we look at any cuts or keeps to budget line items.

I really am encouraged by the implementation of the Launch Virtual Learning as an alternative for students. I have spoken to Launch teachers, and they love the program. I think this is a great way to be competitive with private and charter schools.

I believe that the classroom is the teacher's domain. As long as that teacher is teaching within the bounds of the curriculum, they should have age-appropriate creative license as to how that curriculum gets relayed to the student. That said, teachers should feel encouraged to include parents in the education of their children. It is parents, after all, who raise and teach their children outside of the classroom, and they need to be working in conjunction with teachers.

I appreciated the formation of a committee to investigate improvements and adjustments to the curriculum that was presented to the Board in November. However, it takes time for teachers to adjust to changes just like anyone else. To my knowledge, the curriculum has now changed twice in the last ten years. I wonder where teaks would have worked better than full on cuts. I would like to know who was involved in the committee, how many there were, their years of teaching wisdom and experience, and what input other teachers not on the committee had in the changes suggested to the Board. Before the taxpayers are asked for more of their hard-earned dollars, and thousands of dollars spent on asking through the ballot process, there must be a fine-tuning of the budget.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address your questions and concerns. I hope in these responses that I have gained your support.