

Candidate Questionnaire for 2024 Board of Education Candidate: **Emily Workman**

This questionnaire has been developed by members of the Ithaca Teachers Association Political Action Committee.

1. Why are you running for the Board of Education, and if elected, what will be your priorities?

I am very excited to be running for the Board of Education. Well, I'm excited by the idea of doing the work of a Board member; *running* for the Board is a little stressful!

I believe in this District and its potential. I attended Northeast and DeWitt, before moving out of state. I returned with my family about four years ago, in large part because I wanted my children to receive their education from a district that prioritized equity, anti-racism, and academic excellence.

While the District's vision is closely aligned to these values, there seems to be a breakdown between intention and actual impact. Too often, policies and programs are pushed down from the top, in the absence of adequate staffing, training and support, and funding.

This District prides itself on being innovative in its approach to policy and program development. That's fantastic. But, policy making is not where the work ends. It is just the beginning. I would like to use my role on the Board to shift the focus from good ideas to great implementation. I want to hold the Superintendent accountable to the policies he puts in place by identifying meaningful measures by which impact can be assessed, frequent program evaluation and public reporting, and adaptations and cessation, when change is needed. Doing so will not only allow us to remove what is not working, but to invest more extensively in the strategies that do.

2. What do you see as the primary work of the Board of Education and what makes you particularly qualified to do this work?

The Board is responsible for being the public's voice in the oversight and management of our public school system. It must hold the Superintendent accountable for implementing a shared vision with fidelity, based on community input and evidence-based data and information. The Board has a responsibility to facilitate a more transparent and trusting relationship with the community by setting clear expectations of and accountability for the Superintendent.

I come to you with a wealth of experience that will provide value to the Board. I have worked in early education and K-12 policy for 15 years, directing the K-12 Institute at the Education Commission of the States and as Managing Director of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. I rely on rigorous evidence to identify the most effective policies that improve outcomes for kids and their families, and I use that information to guide state and local leaders. I also spend a lot of time fostering trusting relationships with diverse stakeholder groups to ensure my work is informed by varying perspectives. The same is true in my roles as the PTA president of

Northeast Elementary, Vice-President of the ICSD PTA Council, and board member for the Ithaca Babe Ruth Baseball League. Engaging unique voices ensures the policies and priorities I'm advocating for couple rigorous evidence with stakeholder input.

I know pre-K-12 policy well, and I know people. I am also mom to two amazing kids in 2nd and 4th grade, who are making a home for themselves in our schools. I want to contribute to the ongoing development of a school system with great promise to achieve its potential, and help all students thrive.

[How can a school board know if its goals are being accomplished and its policies being implemented?](#)

The Board should be engaged in a constant cycle of data-informed decision making, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Annually, new expectations of the Superintendent should be set, which need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Same goes for the budget. The Board needs to frequently evaluate if District policies, programs, and resources are leading to their intended impact.

For example, with meaningful data, the Board will be able to effectively assess whether gaps in student engagement and learning outcomes are closing between student groups or if the District's approach to restorative justice is leading to a reduction in recidivism, improved behavior, and student achievement.

[The ICSD has a clear commitment to working towards being an "Anti-Racist School District". What does this term mean to you?](#)

Our district's commitment to anti-racism is a big reason why we returned here four years ago. I am grateful that my children are attending schools where they are encouraged to consider the impacts of structural racism, to hear from and raise up marginalized voices, to think about their own identity and how that impacts the way they experience the world, and how to be an ally. I love that my kids' assignments frequently center on identity, Black or female changemakers, and authors of color. It's cool that students are marching in halls, and leading anti-racist assemblies. It's great to see banned books atop library shelves and warm relationships budding between students with special needs and those without.

Alongside these great signs of an anti-racist school district, I also see challenges. It is not the policies that are problematic, but the way they are implemented.

There are many inclusion policies, teaching strategies, and restorative justice practices that our schools are responsible for implementing, in pursuit of being an anti-racist district. Many of these approaches are evidence-based and have been shown to be highly effective in improving equity, student engagement, and achievement in some schools across the country. That's exciting to think about. But, it is not the policies themselves that produce positive change. It is how they are implemented. It takes a lot of resources, time, training, and support to implement these policies with fidelity. In the absence of these things, policies and programs can cause more harm than good and I hear frequent reports of overwhelming challenges educators are facing as they try to implement these policies without adequate supports.

If it is the District's mission to be an anti-racist school District, they need to be held accountable for better supporting schools, evaluating success, and shifting gears when things aren't working.

3. What are your thoughts on the ICSD's programs for special education students, English Language Learners, and gifted students?

Although I don't have personal experience engaging with these programs, I do know that student supports are inconsistent both within and across schools. Families and students in these programs report big variation in the quality of support they receive from year to year. The majority of ESPs, at least at the elementary level, are poorly compensated and receive insufficient training to support the students they engage with. There is also a lot of turnover. Having an Educators for Inclusion (EIs) in each school offers needed oversight and support for ESPs, but EIs are not in every school, and some that are hold dual roles as the EI and Assistant Principal. They also turn over frequently as they can be transferred year to year.

4. Currently, the ICSD is in contract negotiations with the Ithaca Substitute Association and the Educational Support Professionals. Next year, the District will enter into negotiations with the Ithaca Teachers Association. If you were elected to the Board, what would be your top priorities for those negotiations and how would you advocate for those priorities?

The impact teachers have on their students, schools, and community cannot be overstated. Any role I have related to negotiations will be focused on collecting the information needed to determine what competitive pay and benefits, and working conditions, should look like, and how that aligns with what the District currently offers. We have to find a way to retain our amazing educators, and create incentives for them to work in a school district where many cannot even afford to live.

Through the budget process, I want to see the District target investments where they will have the greatest impact on student success, which include competitive teacher salaries and safe, secure, and well-resourced learning environments. I want to see them deprioritize inflated District administrator salaries and non-essential administrative roles.

A lot is asked of teachers in this district. The innovative nature of this District means there are often new policies and programs that require time to learn, implement, and evaluate. Much of the burden of doing so falls on teachers, increasing the likelihood of burnout. Building the plane while flying it is important because kids can't wait, but we must provide adequate supports to educators as they are the ones doing much of the heavy work.