The achievement gap between Black students and their counterparts has continued to grow in terms of the percentage performing math and reading at their appropriate grade level. What is your specific plan to close that gap?

The achievement gap reflects the opportunity gap. Many students from under-represented backgrounds struggle academically because of significant disparities in resources. These structural and systemic disadvantages include, for example, access to health care, housing, and food. These show up in academic performance as the "achievement gap," but we must focus on the underlying factors.

Closing this gap must happen at the beginning of a student's academic career since the impact appears early. According to data published by the Evanston Roundtable, **in 2023, there was a 40-point difference between white and black students in ELA test scores by the third grade.** These differences persist through a child's time in the Evanston schools.

Dealing with the structural and system resource gaps requires the D65 board to play three roles:

1. Building and sustaining community-wide efforts. Specifically, the board should evaluate all existing partnerships to see if we can scale impact for the most successful ones. JEH and Books & Breakfast come to mind.

2. Building relationships with Evanston City Council and key city staff. The planning and envisioning work should factor in the schools since housing density and economic growth affect issues such as funding and enrollment.

3. Setting up systems for measurement and resource allocation. D65 has failed to close the opportunity gap in the last ten years. Racial disparities remain remarkably sticky. As such, I'd like to ensure we're actually measuring the impact of respective interventions so that we can redirect more resources toward what works. And we need to be wary of chasing new concepts without firm data. For example, I've heard a lot of dismay from teachers and parents alike about doing away with reading specialists in favor of an unproven tutoring program.

How would you maintain an emphasis on equity in district decision-making in the face of our current fiscal challenges and potential cuts in federal funding assistance?

Our budget reduction plan can actually sharpen our focus on equity. The spending cuts are painful on many levels. Real people will be directly affected by job losses, which is important to remember even if we see the value in administrative efficiency.

These changes, however, will shift the impetus for equitable experiences back to individual schools. With less central oversight, the D65 administration has the opportunity to empower educators. Shifting the balance back to teachers and principals will allow them to create the

best possible learning environments and focus on individualizing education to the abilities of each student.

What is your position on the District's adoption of standards-based grading? Are there any improvements or changes you would make to the system?

In D65, we must ensure that standards-based grading (SBG) aligns with the larger academic system.

Specifically, SBG must still prepare students for Illinois state testing (MAP) and D202 letter grading.

My concern with SBG is that it has the most pronounced effect on middle school students, the D65 cohort that struggles the most academically. Between 2015-2023, scores declined by 22% and 35% on state reading and math tests. (Elementary school performance was essentially flat.)

As such, I'd like the D65 board to partner with teachers and learning specialists to ensure that a standards-based approach still prepares students adequately to demonstrate knowledge and advance to a more rigorous high school curriculum.

We also need to refine the system so that parents and students understand how they're doing more clearly. While the research behind SBG is compelling, we should remember that most people - even children - respond to incentives. Letter grades provide a positive motivation for many students.

Historically, there has been a 70%-30% or a 60%-40% division between white children and Black children in D65. How would you address this issue to ensure that all groups are equally represented with equal access at all District 65 schools?

This issue closely aligns with affordable housing and our overall Evanston strategic plan.

If elected as a D65 school board member, one of my top priorities would be to build relationships with Evanston City Council.

We must factor public education into the larger vision for Evanston's future. School quality dictates where people choose to live, but it also affects how we think about related issues like housing density and school assignments. If we anticipate bringing down housing costs by adding more units into a particular part of town, we should also consider the impact on school enrollments.

Local economic growth and opportunities also affect the relative racial makeup of a community. Maintaining diversity in our schools means that the city must support new local businesses that offer economic mobility for under-represented groups.

Historically, there has been a disproportionate representation of Black children, especially boys, being placed in special education. How would you ensure that the IEP isn't a life sentence for these students? What measures would you take to ensure that students are moving back into and have access to regular education classes?

It's worth highlighting that D65 moved toward an inclusion model in recent years. Individualized Education Services (IES) replaced special education, and for the most part, students integrate into regular classrooms.

IEPs provide an excellent resource for qualifying students. They allow families, teachers, and administrators to clarify clear performance goals and metrics while increasing transparency and accountability for students who require additional support.

The D65 board needs to provide oversight to ensure that we're meeting our objective of least intervention and that the plans have specific goals.

How should D65 incentivize Black educators to go into teaching? Is equity at the forefront of the recruiting process?

Most people thrive in their jobs when they're challenged and supported. I suspect most teachers are the same - they want some autonomy to creatively impact their students while feeling that the school district provides resources, training, and structure.

Creating that kind of environment should certainly make D65 a very compelling district for Black educators to work in.

The D65 board can take three specific steps to create this environment:

1. Act as champions for District 65. We need to move beyond the crisis narrative to emphasize the strengths of our community and the opportunity to work with talented students and colleagues in a diverse setting.

2. Use our financial constraints to become more agile and responsive. We can shift from a top-down, resource-heavy district to one that uses data to measure academic impact and invest in the proper teaching and learning resources, including professional development.

3. Invest in our culture and adopt long-term planning processes. Like anyone else, teachers want some level of stability in their employment. We can move beyond reacting to respective crises with a two-pronged approach. First, build a high-performance culture that raises challenges and supports teachers and students. Second, operate with a 5-year plan to provide clarity. That doesn't mean we can predict the future, but we should have established criteria and contingencies in place for issues like class size, enrollment swings, and funding gaps.

In what way have you contributed to and been involved with racial and social justice work in Evanston?

Serving on the D65 board would be my first chance to address racial and social justice. I'm very fortunate that I previously worked for Sean Scott, one of the few black female deans of a U.S. law school. As a mentor, she taught me a lot about the role of power and privilege in the U.S. in shaping inequitable systems and policies.

What is your understanding of the historic educational system/experience in Evanston?

The Evanston educational system mirrors the larger legacy of racism throughout the United States. It's impossible to discuss the current Foster School project without understanding how the city disenfranchised the black community during different periods.

These periods can generally be split into the segregation era from the early 1900s through the mid-1960s and the integration era from 1964 to the present.

Dino Robinson, founder and Executive Director of Shorefront Legacy Center, discussed some of the specific policies of the segregation era in an Evanston Roundtable article from 2021. "By 1930 the Black population was pushed into one area of Evanston that is now known as the Fifth Ward. [Robinson] said this was done through Jim Crow policies, primarily through redlining, real estate agents, and banks' refusal to make mortgages available to Black families."

In 1964, the D65 board decided to integrate its schools under some duress. Like many similar efforts in other parts of the country, however, the integration plan primarily involved bussing black students from black neighborhoods to majority-white schools. Meanwhile, the board turned Foster School into a magnet school.

The result was that black students bore the brunt of the integration efforts, and the school closure eroded the sense of community.

Today, the decision to build a new Foster School reflects a desire to rebuild that community and move away from a 1960s model of integration that emphasized majority-white schools and experiences.

So we're now entering a third era, although I think the board needs to facilitate a more intentional shared vision and purpose.

Governance and Accountability

What is the role of a school board member?

A school board member must prioritize three essential ingredients:

1. Vision and Oversight: What culture do we want to instill in our District? How do we set high expectations for behavior and performance while working with every student to maximize their potential? The board must also foster the desired culture in every school and every classroom. We will accomplish this through robust professional development and empowering educators to create challenging but supportive learning environments.

2. Trust and Transparency: The vision comes from the community itself. Every board member must actively create mechanisms and processes to gather stakeholder feedback, including town halls, community meet-ups, and online forums. In addition, board members must formalize decision criteria and engage in difficult conversations. For example, objective criteria like enrollment and building conditions should drive the school closure process. Change is hard but made easier with consistent communication.

3. Good Governance: This includes the essential duty to hold ourselves and District 65 employees accountable. We need to provide performance metrics that help to measure progress or the lack thereof. In addition, the board must ensure best practices, including timely financial reporting and documented personnel policies.

What informs your decision-making process?

Throughout my career, I've taken a collaborative and data-informed approach.

Collaboration has become a cliche term now, but I was fortunate to earn my MBA at the Kellogg School, where I majored in management and organization. The curriculum emphasized the power of high-performing teams using evidence-based methods. I used these methods to turn around several struggling organizations.

In my prior career as a marketing executive, data was currency and continues to shape my strategy as a small business owner. But data doesn't just mean hard numbers. You can get excellent qualitative feedback from the lived experiences of students, teachers, families, and others.

A good example is the recent discussion over the School Age Child Care (SACC) program. Cutting a program that loses $50k a year may seem obvious given our financial constraints. However, given the glowing public comments on the program and the paucity of summer childcare options, it's more productive to consider the revenue side. There are various ways to model a sustainable program with price increases offset subsidies for lower-income families.

How should the board and district administrators be held accountable for priorities facing the District?

We must first adopt a strategic planning process that codifies our priorities. It's easy to avoid accountability if disagreements exist about what District 65 should be focusing on in the first place. You can see this disconnect between parents and the boards in certain documents.

The priorities must link to specific actions and success measures. For example, if we agreed upon academic excellence as a priority then our personnel policies should reflect that. We should, for example, require strong justification and board approval for central administration roles.

Not success measures are highly quantitative, of course. For example, if the board commits to examining the role of technology in the classroom, the result could be a policy that sets parameters, including the age of introduction and hours per week.

A current board member recently stated during a meeting that the current superintendent was to be commended for not "sweeping the current financial challenges under the rug, which she could have done, but facing them head on". What is your view of the oversight role that the board has regarding the district leadership team?

It's essential to reinforce the behaviors and values you want to see in any organization. We want all D65 leadership and board members to tackle difficult conversations in the open.

At the same time, we need to raise our standards and re-examine our processes. The comment suggests it was previously common practice to hide issues until they exploded into a crisis. We need to set unassailable standards and lofty expectations, along with basic financial controls.

In addition, bringing some financial acumen to the board will help. I've managed multi-million dollar public budgets and know how to ask for timely and relevant financial reporting.

What is your position on the potential merger of D65 and D202?

It's intriguing and potentially worth pursuing, but I don't see the immediate benefit. We need to focus on cleaning up our finances first and foremost, and we have a short timeline for turning things around.

I've also been part of many, many reorganizations in my career. The ones that failed the most were the ones that promised enormous benefits by merging two different organizations. D65 and D202 operate entirely differently, with unique cultures and personnel. It's very challenging to integrate those entities well.

District Priorities and Policies

What are the top priorities facing the District?

1. Financial Stability: Create long-term planning processes that factor various contingencies so that D65 is prepared to deal with economic uncertainty and disruptions.

2. Pedagogic Strategy: Build a culture with high expectations for teachers and students while recommitting to closing the performance gap. While it's convenient to blame the pandemic for learning loss, student performance sharply declined between 2015-2018 and has only recovered in certain spots.

3. Talent Acquisition and Retention: Teachers and principals feel unappreciated, ignored, and burnt out. We must create a work environment where educators feel empowered and want to stay within the District to nurture long-term relationships with families. Satisfied teachers, in turn, become the best recruitment tool.

Do you believe that Northwestern University should play a role in addressing the academic achievement gap in D65? If not, why not? If so, how so?

It's unrealistic to assume Northwestern could play a meaningful role in addressing the opportunity gap. I worked in higher education for over 20 years, and they have different incentives from a public school system. Like all research universities, they focus on producing scholarship. This is a good thing - universities are responsible for many of the significant technological advances of the last 75 years.

Their other core mission is attracting and educating the best students, which requires an enormous operation in athletics, fundraising, admissions, and campus experience. None of this aligns with D65's priorities in any scalable way.

With that said D65 leaders should still seek community partnerships with Northwestern. There are likely mutual interests in specific areas like teacher pipeline and housing.

What is your position on the residency requirement for D65 senior cabinet leaders? Beyond a residency requirement, what is your expectation for senior cabinet leaders to demonstrate Evanston community involvement?

The residency requirement unnecessarily limits our talent pool when we should be seeking to hire the best people possible.

D65 senior cabinet leaders should be judged on their effectiveness as detailed in their job description, full stop. Effectiveness should include specific measures of student achievement. If community involvement helps those outcomes, then great, but I don't think it should be required.

What is your position on the Foster School construction project?

Proceeding with Foster School is the right decision on many levels.

I only wish we had taken a more holistic approach at the beginning. I would have liked a planning process in which the board factored enrollments and demographics into a new building that the District badly needs. That way, we could have sunsetted other schools simultaneously with Foster's opening. That would have given parents more certainty while framing a broader conversation about equity throughout the District.

There are currently no graduation requirements or minimum attendance requirements in D65. What is your position on graduation requirements?

We should explore graduation requirements at the middle school level. We're simply not doing well enough with educating these students, so we need to raise accountability and expectations at Haven, Nichols, and Chute.

The middle school performance metrics dramatically declined well before COVID, so we can't use the pandemic as an excuse. The years between 2015 and 2018 are instructive. State test scores for D65 eighth graders declined 30% in ELA and 35% in math.

Middle school graduation requirements will also improve the value of standards-based grading. Pairing this approach with actual outcome data will be more actionable for students.

What is the District's responsibility to provide and implement research-based effective early intervention to our most vulnerable learners? (reading, math, writing, language)

District 65 should operate with the expectation that it will use evidence-based learning interventions to teach our most vulnerable students. As a public school system, we have a moral and legal obligation to serve every individual.

The details and execution matter a lot, though. We need to hire the right experts to guide schools on the best strategies and ensure that teachers can adapt those to their specific classrooms. And we need to make sure central administration gets out of the way.

How can we ensure that families, teachers, and students have a voice in selecting culturally relevant curriculum?

The board's basic operating mode should include feedback from the community. That includes extra efforts to gather input from stakeholders with perspectives and expertise in culturally relevant curricula. We can't assume that families, teachers, and students will attend board meetings. Board members must actively solicit diverse views from school communities in many formats.

What is your position on the current balance in D65 between SEL and the District's expectations for student academic achievement.

Throughout the District, we should provide robust support for social and emotional learning because it's part of building a thriving academic culture. Students need the tools to self-regulate so they can be active learners. In that sense, SEL is a prerequisite for student achievement.

However, we also need to take a long-term view of SEL. We're not just equipping our students to succeed academically but also to be good people and citizens. SEL is an essential lifelong skill.