

D65 PTA Council School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Please send responses to the PTA Council Executive Team at evanston.skokie.pta.council@gmail.com by February 21. Let us know if you have any questions.

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Brief Bio: Please see website

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1. What motivated you to run for the school board, and what do you see as the board's primary role in shaping district policies?

Running for school board is my opportunity to put my money where my mouth is. I am a Bessie Rhodes parent and have been publicly critical of the board and administration's handling of the closure of our school. However, it is very easy to be critical of a board and administration's decisions from the outside. Through my experiences attending board meetings and reading about the history of the district, both recent and further back, I have come to understand that the challenges facing the board go beyond any one school or construction plan. Our district is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, District 65 has spent the last fifty years struggling with the legacy of Evanston's racist housing and employment practices, which have caused generations of inequitable educational outcomes for the city's black residents.

I may have begun my journey towards my school board campaign as a Bessie Rhodes parent, but I am not running as a Bessie Rhodes candidate. I believe that the district as a whole has been spread too thin for too long. We as a community have been content to lay all of Evanston's problems at the feet of the school system. Any city institution would strain under that kind of pressure and the twin stresses of the pandemic and severe budget shortfalls have stretched the district close to a breaking point. I do not believe we are as close to that breaking point as some in local news or in comment threads on social media would suggest. Nor do I believe that stabilizing the school district will be easy. In fact I think it will be quite difficult, but difficult is not impossible. Everyone in the community who is invested in District 65 schools will have to step up in their own way and in their own capacity. Running for the board is my way to step up. I am an Evanston native with a masters degree in education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I have a broad set of professional experiences that have forced me to learn how to solve novel problems, learn new skills and pivot when a plan is not working. These skills and experiences form the foundation for my qualifications to sit on the District 65 School Board.

My understanding of the school board's role in shaping district policies comes directly from the Illinois Association of School Boards' online training that I participated in in preparation for running for the board. The IASB information can be found [here](#). Much of my answer is adapted from their PDF: *How School Boards Work*, which is available to download from their website. Some highlights that I keep in mind when considering how I might act while on the

board include: "The board studies the needs of students and the community and bases its decisions on those needs." "The local school board is required to adopt and enforce all policies necessary for the management and governance of the public schools of the district." "Through its written policies, the board directs and empowers the superintendent to function as chief executive officer in managing day-to-day district operations." In other words, the school board sets education policy based on the needs and values of the community, then selects a superintendent to execute that policy through the operation of the schools. The board governs, the superintendent manages. The board creates policies. The superintendent implements procedures. The example from Evanston's past that comes to mind is the decision and plan to integrate Evanston schools in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education. The school board made the policy decision to integrate the schools and then they selected superintendent Greg Coffin to implement the procedures to accomplish that goal.

2. How has your past volunteer experience, both within schools and the broader community, prepared you to serve on the school board? Please share specific examples of how your volunteer work has shaped your perspective on key issues facing the district and how it informs your approach to leadership.

Before answering this question, I have to register an objection to it. The question assumes a level of affluence on the part of the respondent such that they can devote significant time to participating in volunteer groups and activities as opposed to seeking income. While I do not have extensive volunteer experience, I am deeply involved in my community. I have provided free childcare for a refugee family in my community. That family has in turn shared freely with mine, having us over for meals, exchanging toys between our children, everything friends and neighbors within a community normally do. I have installed car seats for single parents and spent the day digging cars out of snow. I have collected neighbors' names and email addresses for a news report on the difficulties with insurance companies after damage to our homes and cars from the recent Skokie water main break. I have also had those same neighbors help shovel the ice out of my own garage. I took a second, part-time position as a preschool gym teacher at the YMCA Children's Center for a year while my child attended. The position was paid but it filled an immediate need for the school. I did not teach my child's class. Each one of these experiences, paid or unpaid, official or unofficial has benefitted me just as much as I was able to benefit those I was helping. I think this question misunderstands a fundamental aspect of the school board. Yes, being a member of the school board is unpaid, but it is not volunteer work. It is a responsibility, it is not charity. Volunteer work imposes a hierarchical relationship between the helper and helped, with the helper in the superior position. I am just as dependent on my community as it is dependent on me, if not more. I am a part of my community, enmeshed in it. I do not stand above it. I apologize for the tone of my response but I owe it to you to be honest. My honest belief is that extensive volunteer work does not prepare a candidate to be an effective member of a school board. In fact, I fear it could have the opposite effect, by accustoming a candidate to the one-way, hierarchical relationship between a volunteer and community they serve. This is my approach to leadership. A leader does not bestow their gifts onto a grateful following. A leader leads well because they must, because they are part of the community they lead

3. Given the district's financial challenges, how would you balance cost-cutting measures while ensuring students receive high-quality education and support?

I wish I could answer this question in greater detail but I don't have enough details about the district's finances to do that right now. Instead, I am keeping a few things in mind until I am in a position to learn more: 1) District 65's financial problems are not because of a lack of revenue. 2) Evanston/Skokie is rich in resources, not just financial ones. 3) Our spending per student is high enough that we can reallocate resources or even reduce expenditures significantly and still provide our students with a high-quality education.

With those three points in mind, I would start with a deep dive into the district's "purchased services" budget category. According to the slides presented at Dr. Turner's Structural Deficit Reduction community meetings, that category increased disproportionately to other categories between 2021-2024. If there is a place to search for excess expenditures, my bet is on that budget category.

4. How will you advocate for and protect marginalized student communities, including LGBTQ students, students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing economic insecurity, to ensure an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all?

My answer to this question is covered by my answers to other questions from other forums so I will link to my responses to those questions.

- Regarding students of color, please see my [responses](#) to the Kuumba/Black SonRise forum concerning the disparate academic outcomes between racial groups in District 65
- For LGBTQ+ students, here are my [responses](#) to the questions posed by PFLAG Evanston, Evanston Pride and Gender Affirming Evanston
- My answers regarding students with disabilities and IEPs/504s will be coming out shortly as part of the candidate forum held by [Evanston CASE](#)

5. How do you evaluate the effectiveness and security of technology in the classroom, and would you support re-evaluating current digital tools and curricula?

Technology exists. It does us as a community no favors to try and shield our children from it. That doesn't mean that we have to accept every tablet, laptop or subscription to an educational service that is marketed to our school district. I am very much in favor of reevaluating technology and its uses in District 65 classrooms. I have questions and concerns not only about the security risks, as evidenced by the recent PowerSchool data breach, but about the financial expense of technology in the classroom as well. Every iPad costs money to fix or replace. Every service used by students and teachers costs a regular fee. There is also a cost to our educators in time. In a class period every second counts. How much time is lost in a school day taking out tablets, making sure they're fully charged, making sure students are using appropriate apps? Could time be saved by using pencil and paper or other manipulatives? I

want to know what our students are getting in terms of an enhanced educational experience that is worth the added costs of classroom technology and the numerous data-collecting subscription services that come with it. Ultimately the source that I will trust on this matter is the teachers who we task with using this technology in their classrooms every day. They are the best source when it comes to determining which technology services are an asset and which are a liability to students' educational experiences.

6. What steps would you take to rebuild trust between families and D65, and how do you plan to keep the community engaged in decision-making?

I have spent the last few years attending school board meetings. During this campaign I have watched archived school board meetings from the years preceding my children's enrollment in District 65 schools. The attitude of the school board and administration toward the community in these meetings has been one of superiority. If trust is to be rebuilt between the school board and the community it will have to start at the top, with the board trusting the community enough to be honest. I don't think it will be easy but I think it's possible if we start by strengthening the foundational relationships of a school system, the relationships between student, educator and caregiver.

If the school board focuses on facilitating communication between these three stakeholders I don't think it will be necessary for the board to micromanage communication on every issue taking place in every school since it will already be communicated. My hope is that the enhanced trust built by strengthening the relationships between families and the educators at their schools will lessen the anxiety felt by the community regarding decisions by the board and administration.