

Candidate: Julie Watts

1. Why are you running for Tumwater School Board (again)? What are your priorities if elected?

School should be a place where all kids feel welcome and have an opportunity to thrive. I'm running for school board to ensure that Tumwater schools are not only improving academic outcomes for all kids but are also places where all kids feel safe and know that they belong.

I want to support our district to:

- Stand up to attacks on public education that go all the way to the White House
- Improve outcomes for all children and youth in Tumwater schools, with a focus on those with the greatest barriers to opportunity
- Address our budget deficit, while continuing to invest in quality learning environments for students, teachers and staff
- Ensure our schools are places where students who are LGBTQ, kids of color and kids with disabilities feel safe and know that they belong

2. What experiences or skills do you have to serve as a school board member?

I have over 25 years of experience as a public policy professional helping decision makers understand the real-life impacts of the choices they make. As a Senior Policy Advisor for Government Affairs at the Department of Children, Youth and Families, I work every day to analyze the impacts of government budgets and public policies on children and families. I support agency leaders, The Governor's Office, Office of Financial Management, and the Washington State Legislature to make the right choices for our children.

Prior to my tenure at DCYF, I was the Deputy Director of the Washington State Budget and Policy Center, overseeing budget analysis and community partnerships focused on the wellbeing of children and families. We must balance our school district budget. I know how to be fiscally responsible while also protecting funding for programs that support those with the greatest barriers to opportunity. Making the wrong choices about cutting programs can cost government in the long run and increase racial disparities and disparities for people with disabilities. Budget reductions need to be made with a scalpel, not a sledgehammer.

3. What has Tumwater School District done well? What do they need to do better?

Prior to the COVID pandemic TSD was making good progress toward increasing the percent of students who demonstrated grade level knowledge in English Language Arts and Math, even as enrollment was decreasing. Graduation rates remained steady even through the pandemic. Since the pandemic TSD has been making modest progress toward increasing the percentage of students on-track for college level learning without needing remedial classes in ELA and Math.

However, test scores are still below pre-pandemic levels. Test scores are not the only metric we should be using to track our progress toward supporting students toward lifelong success, but they are a key metric on whether schools are meeting their obligation to improve student outcomes. As student enrollment has declined, the percentage of students with disabilities and higher levels of mental health and behavioral health support needs has increased.

I'm a big supporter of [targeted universalism](#). We need targeted strategies to support achieving universal outcomes for the students with the greatest barriers to success if we want to improve test scores for all students. As a member of the school board I will work with district staff to ensure we have targeted strategies to achieve universal outcomes for our students.

4. What is the role of a school board member vs superintendent?

The role of the school board is to set the expectations, goals and objectives for improving outcomes for all students. The board hires, supervises and evaluates the superintendent, but does not manage day-to-day operations. The board also plays a key role in setting priorities for the district budget and approving it. Ultimately, the school board holds the superintendent accountable for implementing policy and making progress toward the strategic goals of the district.

School board members also have an important role as representatives of the community. School board members are elected for a reason – to be accountable to the community that the district serves. The board plays a key role in listening and being responsive to the community.

5. School districts are considering major cuts to their budgets, and Tumwater SD is experiencing a notable budget shortfall.

- a. What would you recommend cutting and why? I agree with the board's goal to make cuts furthest from the classroom first and focus on the central office and support services. However, the board did not achieve that when it approved cuts that impact the classroom for students with disabilities and those requiring extra support by cutting paraprofessional hours. Cutting paraprofessional hours has a huge impact on teachers and the students with disabilities and those needing academic support to be successful in the classroom.
- b. What do you think should be protected from cuts and why? We need to prioritize maintaining funding for services that support our goals to improve student outcomes. We also need to protect funding that directly supports students with the greatest barriers to success in school, including those with disabilities and those who have mental and behavioral support needs.

6. What strategies do you have for supporting students with special needs and/or English language learners that have not yet been tried?

I believe we need a district-wide special education parent/teacher organization. Not only do families of special education students need a forum for mutual support, but we also need a platform from which to bring about systemic change. Currently, parent/teacher organizations in the district exist at the school level, not district wide. They mainly focus on raising money for special events.

A Special Education PTA at the district level could unite families of special education students, support communication with the Superintendent and district staff, identify systemic issues and hold the board and the superintendent accountable for upholding policies and maintain investments in the special education resources our special ed students need.

7. How should a school board balance the need for functionality – to see agenda items discussed and resolved to move business forward – and a community's access and public participation in the school board's processes?

The Tumwater School Board holds public comment once a month for 30 minutes, allowing 10 speakers 3 minutes each. When more people sign up to speak than the time allows, the board should extend the public comment period, or schedule a special meeting to include public comment so that business can move forward while all voices are able to be heard. Restricting public comment harms the community's trust in the board and increases tensions because people feel unheard.

8. How would you handle conflict between fellow board members or administrators?

Conflict is normal and necessary. How we communicate with one another in conflict matters. The board should establish a working agreement on how they will work together, communicate, share information and respond to conflict when it arises. A working agreement should be updated every year and/or when new members joining the board. All members of the board should participate in developing a working agreement.

I would hope to see an agreement on handling conflict include the following:

- Surface/name conflict early and often
- Assume good intentions
- No personal attacks
- Reflect back what others are saying and check for understanding
- Search for common ground
- Take responsibility for offering solutions and alternatives

9. Can you support a board decision that you did not vote in favor of?

I can support a decision as a decision of the board, even if I didn't agree with it or vote for it. Generally, it is the responsibility of board members to publicly support the decisions of the board. However, if a decision of the board is illegal, I have an obligation to voice and document my concerns and seek and follow legal advice.

10. What is your position on allowing trans students to play sports or participate in other school activities according to their gender identity? How does this align with current Washington State and WIAA laws and policies?

I'm adamantly opposed to the board's passage of Resolution No. 09-24-25. In passing the resolution the school board sent a message to Tumwater families, especially the families of trans and non-binary kids, that they do not support the school district's non-discrimination policy, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's Gender Inclusive Schools policy, or our state laws governing non-discrimination. They told our families they are prepared to direct staff not to support these policies.

They passed this resolution even though they knew that if the policy were ever to be implemented it would violate state non-discrimination laws and would be unconstitutional to implement (according the Attorney General's Office.)

I pledge – that if elected – I will introduce a motion to repeal the resolution and introduce a new resolution affirming the Gender Inclusive Schools policy.

11. How would you respond to threats of federal funding cuts if maintaining federal funding meant violating state law?

I'm running because we need a school board who will stand up to attacks on public education that go all the way to the White House. I will not back down from upholding our state laws against illegal and immoral threats to cut funding to our schools because of hate-filled attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, the rights of our LGBTQ+ students, and attacks on immigrant and refugee families in our state. I will uphold our non-discrimination laws and the Keep Washington Working Act. We have a Governor's Office and Attorney General's Office that are actively challenging the Trump Administration in court. We need to stand with them, not undermine them.

12. Many schools today have clubs based on racial, sexuality, gender and cultural identity. Describe your thoughts surrounding these clubs.

I'm a strong supporter of groups and clubs that provide a safe space for children and youth to connect with others who share their identity and their allies. I'm a strong supporter of Pizza Klatch which creates support groups for LGBTQ+ students and student allies during lunchtime. This program has been a huge support to my child and my family. Pizza Klatch, gay straight alliances, unity clubs and similar affinity groups make our schools safer for our kids, combat racism, homophobia and transphobia and are a powerful platform to prevent and disrupt bullying and exclusion.

13. What is your understanding of HB 2331 and its implications for both instructional materials and books offered by schools, and how would you respond to a request for material review?

ESHB 2331 (passed in 2024) prohibits a school board from refusing to approve or prohibiting the use of a textbook or other instructional material or curriculum on the basis that it relates to or includes the study of the role or contributions of a protected class of people. Basically, school boards cannot ban books because they are authored by or are about protected groups like people of color or the LGBTQ community.

[Tumwater School Board Procedure 2020P](#) establishes the process for an individual to challenge the use or restriction of instructional materials. If I received a request for review, I would direct the person to follow the procedure which is to first discuss this with the teacher and principal at the school level. If the situation cannot be resolved, the individual may formally request review to the Superintendent and request a review by the Instructional Materials Review Committee in a written decision. A majority vote of the IMRC are final. In TSD the School Board does not make the decision.

However, the board does approve the members of the Instructional Materials Committee, and I would not vote to approve an IMC member who supports banning instructional materials in violation of state law.

14. As of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or a member of another political party?

I'm a proud Democrat.

Please return this questionnaire to endorsements.olympia.indivisible@gmail.com no later than May 18.

If you are able to provide a headshot when you return the completed questionnaire, please do! We will use this for our candidate profile page. Many thanks!