

Candidate: Melissa Determan Beard

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

I am running for re-election because I am excited about the strategic plan that will be coming to the board in the next month. I appreciate the work of the team to gather student, staff and community voices. I believe this plan will be helpful to the board in focusing on student outcomes and making future budget decisions. One of my priorities is to ensure this strategic plan is implemented at the board level so staff know we are aligned with their work.

Another priority is to work with staff to ensure board members have the data and information needed to ask the right questions about where we are with our budget. The last budget got away from us because we weren't asking the right questions. I have worked with staff to provide reports that I feel will help us keep better track of the budget. Once we have a sustainable budget, my priority is to focus on providing our current staff with support and tools they need to feel prepared to educate our students.

Finally, I will continue my priority of creating a student-centered system that supports achievement for all. I believe if we focus on the needs of students instead of maintaining a system that is comfortable for adults, students will be more engaged in their learning and advocate for their needs. This priority is why I opposed the WIAA resolution. That resolution was not student centered and in fact, negatively impacted students.

Since I've been on the board, I have worked to expand the number of student representatives and worked with them to participate in more of the board meeting, not just during "Student Reports" on the agenda. I believe modeling for the rest of the district how students can contribute to decision-making will help staff get creative in how students can contribute at the building and classroom levels.

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

I have 9 years of experience as a board member and 20 years of experience with K-12 budgets at the state and school district level as a budget advisor to the state superintendent and chief of finance and operations for a nearby school district. I also have experience working with linked early learning, K-12, postsecondary and workforce data. These skills help me understand the data shared with the Board around accountability measures.

I feel my greatest skill as a school board member is the ability to connect with and listen to people in the Tumwater community. During the teacher's strike in 2018, right now talking about transgender student rights, and many times in between, I reach out to the people who agree and disagree with me to learn their perspective on the issue. As a citizen, I know I want to be heard by my elected officials, so I work to be accessible to the Tumwater community.

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

Our district has educators and staff who care about their students and families. When I visit the schools, I see many people who love their schools. I am also proud of the partnerships the District has with TOGETHER!, the Tumwater Chamber of Commerce and the City of Tumwater. These partnerships allow experts in their fields to serve our students instead of expecting educators to do this work.

We can do a better job addressing bullying, serving our multilingual learners and students with IEPs, and supporting a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students and staff.

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

The role of a school board member is to adopt policies, approve a budget, hire/fire/support a superintendent and hold the superintendent accountable for reaching the goals approved by the Board. The superintendent makes all the operational decisions needed to carry out the policies, carry out the budget and reach the goals.

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? The school board adopted budgeting principles in our January meeting (see below). Our principles include staffing closer to the staffing levels funded by the state by basic education funds. While we understand the state does not provide enough resources to fund all the needs of students, this was a way for staff to look at how to make these decisions.
- b. What do you think should be protected from cuts and why? I think interventions that have shown results should be protected from cuts because we want to make sure our staff and students have the best resources possible.

The Board's job is to put forth the budgeting principles and then let staff bring their recommendations based on those principles. I have watched board members pressure superintendents to make certain staffing decisions and I do not see that as an equitable practice.

Our budgeting principles are as follows:

1. Consider reductions that create closer alignment with the state's prototypical school model
2. Reduce or delay non-employee related costs first
3. Consider the long-term sustainability of optional programs offered. For each, consider the impact on students, particularly those with the highest needs.
4. Look at our current initiatives, consider which are most impacting learning
5. Use attrition and consider not replacing vacated positions
6. Consider the need for appropriate, reasonable, and sustainable levels of reserves to support future decision-making by the Board.

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

As a Board member, I would defer to staff to make specific recommendations and I would advocate with the Legislature for more funding for these two programs because I know we don't have enough money to provide all the supports our students need.

I see that our district is working on inclusion for our students with special needs and multilingual student, which I believe benefits all the students in that classroom. I would be interested in how we can provide more support for the classroom teachers around Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This includes time for teachers to visit other classrooms, mentor teachers in the classroom and additional professional development. We are doing some of this but teachers need more time and support. We also have more teachers being trained in GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) which has been shown to help multilanguage learners.

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 board should set the expectation that business does not move forward without time for the community to learn about and make comment on processes. We do this with our policies quite easily in that they are introduced at one meeting and voted on at least one month later. The Board should be willing to slow down when they see interest from the community.

I am proud that as Board President from 2019-2021, I insisted that we record and post board meetings before we were required to because I wanted to give the community an opportunity to see our meetings on their own time. It is our job as elected officials to provide ways to include the community.

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

I respect each board member and administrator as a human being and a teammate. I assume good intentions and grant other board members grace. When there is conflict, I listen to their concerns, reflect on my actions and prioritize relationships.

I am aware that my fellow board members believe conflict exists now because I disagreed with them about the transgender athlete resolution. In this case, I did prioritize student needs above my relationship with my fellow board members. Even in this environment, I treat each of them respectfully and do my job as a school board member.

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

Our Board operating protocols require this and what this means to me is that I do not speak out against the decision in subsequent board meetings or with staff. In regards to the recent board decision I did not vote in favor of, I do speak about my support of all students in our district, especially transgender students and I do not speak specifically about the resolution.

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 fully support trans students to play sports and participate in school activities according to their gender identity, as is required by state law and WIAA policies.

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

We have to continue following state law. A threat of federal funding cuts becomes a state vs federal government issue that is fought in the courts. There is no reason to believe that appeasing the federal government would mean we still wouldn't be cut.

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

Many of these clubs exist because students have identified a need to have a place to discuss these topics or find community. I support fulfilling these needs but it also makes me wonder what may be missing or happening in the school where students have these needs.

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?

My understanding of HB 2331 is that school boards can't ban books or materials that include people in a protected class. There is a process for families and community to review materials prior to the curriculum being adopted by the board. Once this has been completed, we have done the work. If down the line someone has requested a material review, I would want to know the reason and determine if another review needs to be completed. One reason to honor the request would be if the supplemental materials were not part of the original review. Another reason would be that there may be more opportunity for inclusion materials.

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

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!