Due 3/2

LWV

**What skills, experience and qualities would you bring to this office?**

I competently and honorably fulfilled my commitment to the community as a board member for 2 years and then Board President for 2 years during the pandemic, effectively collaborating with the administration, asking pertinent questions, and providing feedback in the mantra of a “critical friend”. Also, I was one of the board members involved in contract negotiations for the Park Ridge Education Association (PREA) and Support Staff Council (SSC). I participate in continuing education through webinars, meetings, and the annual conference offered by the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). At the PTO level, I served as the President for an elementary school in the St. Louis area and the President at Emerson Middle School. I was involved in a tax levy campaign at our prior school district and brought this experience to the recent bond referendum for Maine 207. Professionally, I started my career as a high school math teacher. For over 25 years in post-secondary settings, I have worked as an Academic Advisor, Career Counselor, Student Orientation Director, and Faculty Member. My graduate degree in counseling and terminal degree in educational leadership provide me with additional tools to continually apply to my role as a school board member.

**What are the most pressing issues facing this office? How do you propose to address them?**

I can discuss a multitude of issues facing the D64 school district in the coming years, but I will limit my response to three issues.

First and most time-sensitive will be assisting with the transition of the new superintendent. Since I have been on the board for four years, working closely with the current superintendent and other district administrators, I can assist by sharing the knowledge and experience I have gained through my two years serving as the Board President. Additionally, one of my prior professional experiences involved developing a leadership program at the doctoral level at Maryville University, so I am familiar with evidence-based leadership practices.

Secondly, there is an administrator and teacher shortage nationally and locally, with not as many individuals pursuing a career in education, partly due to the pandemic. Although D64 has been successful in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, this will probably become more challenging in the next few years coupled with the fact that a substantial percentage of our current educators will be retiring. At a recent Illinois Association of School Board conference, I attended a session on the topic of the teacher shortage in the state, and one of the ideas shared was that another district created a partnership with a local college with a robust teacher education program. One of the components of the partnership included the placement of student teachers. This is advantage for the emerging educators and the district since both can experience a “trial run” of working in the district through the student teaching experience. Personally, I was offered a position as a high school mathematics teacher after successfully completing my student teaching in the district. Related, if the board, administration, and district can become more stable in the next few years, this can assist in recruiting and retaining competent staff. If I am elected, I believe I can contribute to more stability on the board.

Thirdly, from a financial perspective, the district needs to integrate the cost of implementing full-day kindergarten into its budget. From a philosophical perspective, I was not supportive of the recent board decision to charge tuition to families for the full-day program, but voted in favor of this decision from a financial standpoint. In conjunction with the construction completed to offer full-day kindergarten, needed district facility improvements were made including the re-location of the district office to dormant space at Jefferson School. Through researching other local districts, most have discontinued the practice of charging tuition within five years of program implementation. This seems to be a realistic goal for D64.

**What is your understanding of social emotional learning and its inclusion in the curriculum for D64 schools?**

As a trained school counselor, I champion SEL in the curriculum in schools since this helps support more productive learning in academic subjects and is designed to create a more positive learning environment in the classroom and in the school, in general. Related, since the pandemic, more individuals have struggled with anxiety, stress, and overall mental health, so for SEL curriculum is necessary to support the education of the whole student. In connection to the district’s strategic plan, I expressed interest and was selected to serve as one of the two board members on the committee responsible for its development. Therefore, I am an advocate for the *process* used to create the plan, and the strategic plan *product* that resulted from the collaboration between this committee and the administration. Continuing to enhance SEL is part of the current plan.

What is your experience with inclusion and what do you think our school district can do to increase inclusive practices?

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) aligns with educating with whole student since the US has been traditionally termed as a “melting pot” with the percentage of racial minorities continuing to increase and the white population projected to become a minority. The district has a responsibility to educate citizens and future leaders to function productively in a culturally diverse environment. Practices aligned with DEIA are included in the strategic plan such as evaluating hiring practices, implementing anti-bias education, embracing culturally inclusive materials in the curriculum, and offering events that honor diversity. As a board member, I can advocate for progress on these initiatives and continue to utilize inclusive language at board meetings and district events.

**What do you think it means for students to be supported in the ‘least restrictive environment’?  Do you think D64 provides adequate accommodations?**

Overall, in connecting to students with special needs, the district has taken several instrumental steps during the past year. First, a comprehensive external audit of student support services was completed. Second, a new Director of Student Services was hired, and I am confident that her background in social work will contribute to a meaningful program for the district. Third, a diverse committee of district constituents recently convened to create a student services action plan. If elected, I will advocate that the new superintendent supports the execution of this plan. The Student Learning Community (SLC) program has been successfully implemented at Washington School, and there is a plan to offer another similar classroom soon. Both initiatives support retaining students in the district without outplacing them to programs in neighboring communities. Furthermore, I have communicated with several of the district’s patient and dedicated teacher assistants who support individual students as they are integrated into classroom settings. This aligns with placing students in the least restrictive environment with the support of aides and resources. Overall, the district prioritizes professional development and continuing education for the staff, and the area of special education is part of this learning.