A picture containing person, outdoor, grass, tree

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**Denise Pearl, PhD**

**District 64 School Board Candidate**

**(2-year term)**

**denisepearl.com**

Denise Pearl – Candidate for a 2-year Term D64 School Board on Facebook (@denisepearld64schoolboard)

**D64 will soon be hiring a new Superintendent.  If elected, how would you work to support the Superintendent in achieving the District’s goals and mitigate disruptions and distractions?**

As communicated with the executive search committee, I am an advocate of the *process* used to create the plan, and the strategic plan *product* that resulted from the collaboration between the strategic planning committee and the administration; therefore, it would be in the best interest of the district if the new superintendent executed this plan. Related, leadership research recommends that leaders spend substantive initial time understanding the district and community and developing meaningful relationships with its constituents, without making substantial changes and decisions. If I am in the position of a board member or the board president, I can encourage these practices. Also, I will work to achieve a rapport level with the new superintendent so we can have meaningful and direct conversations, offering feedback in the paradigm of a “critical friend” when applicable.

**Please share one goal that you would like to help achieve if elected to the D64 school board.**

As the current board president, I have the goal of improving the functioning of the D64 board, so it operates similarly to other school boards in Illinois. Under my leadership, the board participated in a self-evaluation, which was not done previously and is one of the functions of a school board. Additionally, the board agreed to a revised policy about public comment, and I have enforced this policy firmly and consistently without board members responding directly to public comments. If elected, I would like to continue this work in collaboratively establishing and adhering to board norms so the board can function in a more respectful and efficient manner.

**Is it the role of school boards to be involved in operational decisions (such as the selection of books and course materials, the designation of snow days and the scheduling of student concerts)?  Why or why not?**

In 4 years as a board member, I applied the metaphor of a dance floor in that board members should view the district from the balcony level with administrators and staff members on the dance floor interacting with day-to-day decisions and procedures. With the example of cancelation of school due to snow, the board should approve the policy about school cancelations and the annual school calendar; however, the board should allow the superintendent to make these decisions without board consultation.

While on the board, I attended the Illinois Association of School Board’s Annual Conference to improve how I function as a board member. Specifically, I attended an interactive session on decision-making to clarify if district decisions should be made from a continuum of the board only to the superintendent/administration only with communication and collaboration in between. I organized this same training for the D64 board to clarifying roles.

**Under what circumstances would you consider limiting the inclusion of certain books or materials in a library? Who should be responsible for making those decisions?**

As I listened to a recent podcast about the topic of library books, a quote from the librarian who participated in the podcast has stuck with me stating that “every student should find themselves on the shelves”. Therefore, libraries should include diverse materials by topic, reading level, varied authors, etc…A limiting factor for not including certain books in the library would be age appropriateness since the libraries in the schools serve students in a certain age demographic. However, determining what is age appropriate is not always a “black and white” decision. Those who work directly with students such as librarians, reading interventionists, and classroom teachers can weigh in on decisions about books and other learning resources not only available in the library but in classrooms and other areas of the school setting.

**Do you think incorporating principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and social-emotional learning (SEL) in school curriculum is appropriate? Why or why not?**

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 there is certainly a need for an SEL curriculum to support the education of the whole student. DEI also 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.