

# **Board of Education**

## **Candidate Forum**

### **1. What is your motivation for seeking a school board position and what have you done to prepare yourself for it? (Please include your strengths and weaknesses)**

I believe that curriculum and teaching are at the heart of a school's mission. Unfortunately, I think consistently poor decisions have been made on important curricular matters. I applied for the open seat on the school board in May 2007, after learning that the district had been systematically rebuffing and ignoring legitimate curricular concerns raised by a number of individuals and groups

Unfortunately, the mind set that results in bad curriculum decisions is pervasive and prevents good-decision making in all critical areas. I believe it is time to make responsiveness an issue in the school board elections.

I think school board members need to actively focus debate on the following critical areas:

- Implementing smart and unbiased curriculum evaluation
- Insisting on fiscal transparency and accountability
- Creating an atmosphere where teachers can have trust in the fairness and objectives of the central administration.

I have actively sought out the opinions and advice of the following stake-holders:

- teachers, to understand issues at the classroom level, and principals, to understand issues at the school level
- current students, for their immediate concerns, and recent graduates for their overall perspectives
- parents and community groups

I have studied the issues that affect the short and long-term management of CPS, including the budget, school re-districting, and assessment programs such as AFL and Great Expectations. I have met with members of the central administration to request explanations on range of issues.

### **2. What is your personal investment in the school system's success (i.e., volunteering at the district, community and school levels, personal experiences in CPS, etc.)?**

I have a life-long commitment to the education of children and young adults. I have spent my whole life preparing for and working in a university setting. I work closely with many recent high school graduates at MU. I believe that I can provide a valuable front-line perspective on the actual outcomes of educational decisions made in public schools. From my perspective, many educational "experts" and "research" studies are disconnected from the important realities.

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I have two children currently in CPS. I have always volunteered in their schools and classrooms. I have had the privilege of presenting guest lectures on topics including brain anatomy, medical imaging research, and perspectives on various measures of intelligence.

### **3. What budget issues and solutions do you see for the Columbia Public Schools in the next five years?**

The largest and most important expenditure is teacher salary and benefits. In order to recruit and maintain quality teachers, CPS must continue to improve teacher salaries and benefits.

An important place where smart management and discretion have a major, but less obvious, budgetary impact is the curriculum. Implementing a good curriculum is cost effective. A bad curriculum requires large hidden outlays on remedial measures.

Poorly planned initiatives from the central office have already resulted in massive financial and workload burdens spreading through the school system, further compounding the serious problems caused by poor curricula.

### **4. What ideas do you have to recruit quality teachers and support the longevity of their employment?**

Finding and keeping talented teachers is critical to maintaining the excellence of a school district.

Salary is essential. The starting salary for a teacher in CPS is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest among our 12 peer districts. We must of course be competitive on salaries.

About 30% of new teachers nationwide quit within their first three years on the job. Salary is not the only reason.

I believe that we need to:

- guarantee that class preparation time is not taken up by additional bureaucratic mandates
- provide uniform support and mentoring for all new teachers
- make small class size a priority, cutting central office staff and expenses before increasing class size
- ensure that teachers can communicate their ideas and concerns to administration without fear of retribution

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- 5. Studies continue to show that parental involvement increases a student's success rate. What specific actions would you take to build programs which increase parental involvement within CPS?**

The most important thing is for parents to have an understanding and investment in their student's learning in each class. In order to help in a meaningful way, parents need access to curriculum materials. This will also help parents become informed partners with teachers in making individual decisions for their children's current and future learning.