CNC / PTA Council
2015 School Board Candidate Questionnaire
for School Districts 65 and 202
Evanston/Skokie, Illinois

Part I – Involvement

Candidate for District ☐ 65 or ☒ 202

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Occupation: Attorney/Director of Pro Bono Services
Educational Background: ETHS Class of 1974; Harvard University, B.A. in Government, 1978; University of Chicago Law School, J.D., 1982
Volunteer or Community Activities: District 202 Board of Education, 2011 - ; District 65 Board of Education, 2003-07; Y.O.U. Board of Directors, 1990-2003, 2007-11; City of Evanston Human Relations Commission, 1990-91; Chair, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, 2003-05_
Other Experience: Legislative Aide to U.S. Rep. Abner J. Mikva, 1978-79; Staff Attorney, Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic, 1986-88
Do you have children? ☒ Yes ☐ No
What school(s) do (did) they attend? Three attended Kingsley, Haven, and ETHS and are now in college; one is a sophomore at ETHS
How long have you lived in Evanston/Skokie? Since 1966 (with brief interruptions)

Part II – Platform

1. What motivated you to run for school board this year?

I am running for re-election because I believe I am helping to make a great school even greater, and I want to continue the work I have begun, particularly in the areas of bringing Districts 65 and 202 together as one learning community and individualizing the ETHS student experience.

2. What personal qualities, training or experience do you have that would be of value as a school board member? (Please answer briefly in essay form and do not attach a resume.)

The personal qualities I bring are a livelong dedication to Evanston/Skokie and its schools, a strong personal investment in, and ground-level knowledge of, ETHS as the parent of three recent graduates and a current ETHS student, a passion for equity and excellence, and a demonstrated willingness to do my homework and ask the hard questions. I believe my training as a lawyer helps me bring an analytical approach to issues facing the Board. My unique experience as a veteran of both the District 65 and the District 202 Boards enables me to serve as a bridge between the two districts. My experience as a lawyer who primarily represents the most vulnerable in our society, and victims of discrimination in particular, is a key asset I bring to the Board's equity work.

3. If elected, what will be your top three priorities as a school board member?

1. Continue to promote equity and excellence for each ETHS student.
2. Continue efforts to bring Districts 65 and 202 together as one learning community.
3. Enhance individualized guidance for every ETHS student.

4. What should the school board's responsibility be to the community? To parents? How should voters assess the effectiveness of the board and its individual members?

The school board's responsibility is to proactively engage the community so that it can be its voice, and then to add to what it learns from the community all the other information it can gather, and then apply its best judgment to all of that in setting the overall direction of the school district and overseeing the school administration to make sure that this direction is being advanced. The school board's responsibility to parents is the same as it is to the community as a whole, except that the school board must be especially sensitive to the invaluable reality check parents (and students) uniquely bring to the matters the board may hear about in formal presentations only at a theoretical level. The effectiveness of the board as a whole should be assessed based on the district's progress toward its goals. The effectiveness of individual members should be assessed by asking: Are they listening to the community? Are they doing their homework? Are they asking the hard questions? Are they making a difference by their service?

5. What are the major strengths of the school district? How can we build on them? What are its major weaknesses? How can we address them?

The district has many strengths. Among them are the quality of its faculty, the diversity of its students, the richness of its academic offerings and supports, and the commitment of the community it serves to excellence in education. We can best build on these strengths by enhancing our collaboration with District 65, proactively engaging all our stakeholders in decisionmaking, and setting clear, measurable goals and then closely monitoring our progress toward them. The greatest challenge our district faces is to individualize the experience of our large and diverse student body so every student can fully access all the great opportunities ETHS offers and achieve his or her highest potential.

6. Describe your understanding of school board governance and the role of the board versus the roles of the superintendent and the administration.

The board is a link in a chain of accountability: The board is accountable to the community, the superintendent is accountable to the board, and everyone else who works at ETHS is accountable to the superintendent. The role of the board is to (1) set policy that reflects community values, (2) employ a superintendent, set clear, measurable goals for him, and engage in vigorous oversight to ensure that those goals are implemented with fidelity, and (3) act as a fiduciary for the taxpayers to make sure that the public's funds are spent appropriately and efficiently.

7. Select two major decisions made by the school board within the last four years about which you have a strong opinion. Explain why you agree or disagree with these decisions.

1. The board made a crucial decision in rejecting the administration's proposal to extend elements of the Freshman Restructuring to sophomore-level classes without awaiting the results of an outside evaluation of the freshman year innovations to see if they actually work. This decision by the board was important because it demonstrated the board's commitment to data-driven decisionmaking.
2. The decision of the board, and of the District 65 Board, to adopt an unprecedented joint literacy goal, calling for "backmapping" specific college and career readiness marks from 12th grade back all the way through to kindergarten was profoundly important, both because it underscored our commitment to forge the two districts into one learning community, and because the data to be gathered is an essential tool to diminish the achievement gap and ensure that all our students achieve their full academic potential.

Part III – Student Achievement and Assessment

8. If elected, describe how you will contribute toward enhancing student achievement. How should the district address the needs of students in the top and bottom quartiles of the achievement spectrum?

I will contribute toward enhancing student achievement primarily by securing re-adoption in our 2015-18 District Goals of the goal I successfully advocated for inclusion of in our 2012-15 District Goals: "Increase each student's academic trajectory as demonstrated through multiple measures," and by vigorously monitoring our progress toward that goal. I will also push for systematic evaluation of the programs we have in place for enhancing student achievement. Evaluation will enable us to expand those programs that have been proven to work and to fix or replace those that have not. I will continue to push for increased collaboration in preparing District 65 students for District 202, which is essential for enhancing student achievement.

The district should address the needs of students in the top and bottom quartiles of the achievement spectrum the same way it should address the needs of students across the achievement spectrum: by focusing on each student as an individual, identifying each student's unique talents, deficits, aspirations, and circumstances and providing the instruction and supports necessary for that student to achieve his or her full potential.

9. What role should standardized testing have in assessing students, teachers, and instructional methods?

Standardized testing should have a role – but hardly the exclusive role – in assessing students, teachers, and instructional methods. While standardized tests have their limitations, it is essential to have an external measure, along with the internal ones, of the success of our instructional efforts. Specifically with regard to teachers, any system for assessing their performance must be developed with their full participation and reflect their buy-in. Any assessment system that does not have this is doomed to failure. Finally, in order to avoid the burden of excessive testing, we should strive to use standardized tests that serve multiple purposes: not only providing a measure for the state to rate our school and its students, but, more importantly, to improve instruction and aid our students in college admission and placement.

Part IV – Student, School & Parental Partnerships

10. Explain your vision for student, parent and school partnerships. How do these differ from Cradle to Career and other community partnerships?

Cradle to Career is an important development for our community. It promises to promote essential partnership at the macro level – partnership between the school districts, the city, nonprofit organizations that serve our youth, early childhood education providers, etc. But we also need to focus on partnership – with parents and students particularly – at the micro level, one-on-one. This means not only being welcoming and supportive to parents who actively seek involvement in their children's schooling and in larger school affairs, but using intense outreach efforts to establish partnerships with parents who, for whatever reason, are not bringing themselves to us. Given the critical role of families, we must be as committed to helping them achieve their full potential in supporting their children's education as we are to helping their children achieve their full potential. One is essential to the other.

11. What is your vision for the partnership between District 65 and District 202? Which areas of collaboration are most important and why?

Having served on the District 65 Board, it has been, since I ran for the District 202 Board four years ago, my consuming passion to create a seamless educational experience for the students of Districts 65 and 202. At the time this goal seemed unreachable: the districts were barely on speaking terms and interactions between the two were largely ceremonial. This has begun to change dramatically. We have adopted the first ever joint board goal on student achievement, from pre-K through 12th grade, we have mandated that the two superintendents annually present to both boards a joint assessment of academic progress by students K-12, and we have initiated a joint calendar development process. My vision is for Districts 65 and 202 to be "one learning community," despite being two separate districts. I believe this is possible and I believe that it is necessary. Collaboration on all sorts of matters (technology, purchasing, etc.) is important and desirable, but the most important collaboration is the educators of both districts working closely together to set common standards for all our students K-12 and sharing the instructional content and techniques to enable them to meet (and, hopefully, exceed) those standards.

Part V - Budget

12. How will you influence fiscal efficiencies at the school district?

I will seek to institute a system of regular, periodic evaluations of all district programs to make sure that we are getting the maximum bang for our buck. Achievement of economies of scale through sharing of services with District 65 should also bring greater efficiencies.

13. If budget cuts are necessary, which areas deserve priority and why?

Safety, instruction, and guidance/support. Maintaining a safe environment at the school is a prerequisite for everything else we do. Instruction is the heart of what we do. And guidance and support are essential for our students to take full advantage of the instruction we provide.