

CNC / PTA Council  
2017 School Board Candidate Questionnaire  
for School Districts 65 and 202  
Evanston/Skokie, Illinois

**Part I – Involvement**

Candidate for District  65 or  202

Name: Candance Chow  
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Occupation: Owner, In Sight Consulting – Management Consulting Practice  
Educational Background: MBA, Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University; BA, Public Communications, American University  
Volunteer or Community Activities: Founding Member and Member of Advisory Board, Caring Outreach by Parents of Evanston (COPE); Evanston Advisory Board Member, Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH); Former PTA President, Kingsley; Former co-chair, Health, Safety and Wellness Committee of Evanston Cradle to Career; Y Readers Program Tutor; Member and former Elder of First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette  
Other Experience: 25+ years of management experience to drive innovation and improve impact for nonprofits and small to medium sized businesses.  
Do you have children?  Yes  No  
What school(s) do (did) they attend? Kingsley (5<sup>th</sup> grader), Haven, ETHS (9<sup>th</sup> grader)  
How long have you lived in Evanston/Skokie? 20+ years

**Part II – Platform**

1. What motivated you to run for school board this year?  
The impetus for my original run for school board was that I have seen personally the difference public education can have in shaping one's future. My mother never graduated from high school, and it was imperative to her that I receive an excellent education to set me up for success. I want that same promise and possibility for every child in Evanston/Skokie. This is why I ran four years ago and why I would like to continue serving students and families through service on the school board. Additionally, I believe the experience I have had on the board as Finance Chair and now Board President are critical to the work that lays ahead to ensure our school district continues to serve the needs of our students, prepare them for the future, and address our own financial issues.
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.)

My professional experience in nonprofit management and consulting provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of a school systems such as ours especially given the very difficult system wide decisions we may need to make to address our financial situation. My ability to listen, collaborate and work as a team with teachers, parents, community, board and administration to arrive at creative solutions is critical. My personal commitment to learn about and know each school, the larger context of education in our state/nation, and the particular issues for our students and families enable me to see issues from various perspectives. Finally, my involvement in our partner organizations and other groups that work to serve families in Evanston offers useful insight on the role the school plays in preparing students and also growing stronger families.

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

My first priority would be to continue advancing our work to achieve better and more equitable outcomes for all of our students, especially where we see the largest gaps in achievement based on race or ethnicity. I believe our focus on the following key areas will be essential in this work

- Focus on early literacy and kindergarten readiness
- Advancing our equity agenda through shifts in systems, policy and practices that create obstacles to serving ALL students well and equitably
- District wide commitment to implementing culturally responsive instruction
- Improved hiring and retention of excellent teachers and leaders who reflect our student diversity
- Focus on the whole child and social emotional learning supports through our school climate work and restorative practices
- Intensive support for our striving learners
- Parent and community partnerships to engage and support families

My second priority would be to ensure the district's financial solvency over the short and long term. This entails continuing to make decisions that preserve our system as a whole, but most notably continuing to support the work of teachers, provide students with the academic and social/emotional supports they need, and enable the district to be flexible, responsive and innovative as we move forward.

My third priority is to nurture and continue to grow our partnerships with educators and staff as well as our external partners that have been critical to our progress over the last several years. I truly believe we can only achieve for students if we do it together. We have broadened and deepened relationships with Foundation 65, Cradle to Career, Northwestern, YMCA, YOU, Family Focus, Moran Center, Books & Breakfast, COPE and many others. We are seeing the dividends on these relationship investments through better outcomes for children and families.

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?

In short, the board's responsibility to the community is to connect with the community, listen to concerns and priorities, engage the community in shaping the direction and goals of the school district and represent the community's interests as a steward of the

community's greatest asset our children and of course their financial resources as well. The board's responsibility to parents is similar but also includes to ensure a safe and supportive environment in which their child's academic and personal growth are nurtured. Voters should assess the Board's effectiveness by monitoring its progress towards the goals and outcomes the Board and Administration have committed to via the strategic plan. There were more than 2,000 individuals in our community who participated in the development of our vision, mission and five-year plan. We should be held accountable for overseeing the fidelity of implementation of the plan and achieving the academic and other targets it sets for our schools. As individual members, we should be assessed on our ability to reach consensus professionally and respectfully, our preparedness and understanding of the issues before us and the decisions we make, and our ability to engage the community in productive ways to inform these decisions.

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?

Our greatest strength is of course the 8,000 beautiful humans who are in our schools every day. That said, other major strengths include the excellence and commitment of our professionals and staff at all levels of the district, the willingness to grow and change as ways of teaching and learning grow and change, and the commitment our parents and partners have to our children. I believe we can build on these strengths by creating space and opportunity to address our greatest concerns head on, solve problems collaboratively and take risks to accelerate our progress whether that be through new teaching methods, new policy and practices or different approaches to engaging students and families.

Our major weaknesses currently include an unstable financial infrastructure that threatens the quality of education we expect and our children deserve. We are also deficient in that currently not all students are reaching the outcomes and benefiting from this educational system equitably. We must look for additional supports from the community to assist us in the former, and we must ensure we maintain and accelerate our commitments to the community and our equity agenda to address the latter.

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

I believe the three most important questions a board member should strive to answer are 1) What are we trying to achieve for our students; 2) What does success look like when we are there? and 3) How are we doing against this vision in our performance? Effective governance includes understanding the views, issues and concerns of parents, students, faculty and administration, as well as looking at the trends, innovations and best practices in education overall. Based on this knowledge base, an effective board will then govern by developing an overall point of view regarding how to best move toward its mission and vision of student success. Additionally, the Board will be accountable for ensuring the resources we allocate and the specific strategies implemented by the district are moving us closer toward our goals.

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.

Three years ago the Board developed a new policy related to suspensions in order to reduce the amount of lost instruction, provide restorative alternatives to punitive action, and reduce disproportionality of suspensions particularly for African American and special needs students. This action came in advance of many other districts and national attention on the school to prison pipeline. I am extremely proud to have advocated for these policy changes and that our district continues to see our results improving in this area. We still have work to do. Secondly, the Board adopted a five-year strategic plan with a holistic focus on both academic and social emotional success for ALL children. Along with this plan we adopted a set of outcome metrics that included for the first time ever holding our district and ourselves accountable specifically for reducing the achievement gap. I am very proud of pushing for this metric to be added to our goals as a district.

### **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? How should the district address achievement disparities by race, ethnicity, or other demographic differences?

My contributions to enhancing student achievement will come in holding us accountable for the holistic plan we have developed and our equity agenda which works in tandem with this plan to ensure our policies, practices and resources are set up to enable every student to feel safe in the school, see the potential they have in life, and prepare themselves to deliver on this potential.

I believe our work to ensure striving learners in the bottom quartile all have plans for intervention is essential as well as focus on executive function and other non-cognitive skills. In the last two years, the district has reduced the percentage of striving readers (25% and below) by 13%. I would work to sustain this work and grow it beyond the twenty-fifth percentile as resources allow. I also am committed to providing challenge for all learners at whatever level of preparedness, and yet this is extremely difficult to deliver. I believe our creative use of technology to support differentiated instruction, continued professional development, and ongoing evaluation of instructional design to support teachers in meeting the varied needs of students will help us continuously improve in this area.

Regarding addressing achievement gaps related to disparities by race, ethnicity and other differences, I am very proud of the work our Board and Administration have embarked on with the adoption of an equity statement and agenda. Delivering on this commitment will require work in every school to understand the conditions for students and identify obstacles at both the school level and district-wide that are preventing our children from reaching their full potential. It will require us to take intentional steps to educate ourselves, and our staff on equity with the goal of using this learning to shift and improve outcomes in the classroom.

I believe the following are strategies, which are underway, but must be pushed forward and sustained over time to achieve meaningful results for our kids:

- 1) Improvements in institutional equity through our work at the board, policy and school level this year and going forward. This ranges from education and training to identifying inequities and looking at the systemic source of those to make changes.
  - 2) Improved hiring and retention of Black/Latino professionals as well as other underrepresented groups
  - 3) Professional development/culturally relevant instruction in every school as primary shift to instruction throughout the district
  - 4) Increased focus on prek-3 literacy and modifying models and instruction to better meet the needs of Black, Latino and English Language Learner students
  - 5) Family/community engagement that ranges from English Language classes for parents to parents as partners and our expanded community schools initiative
  - 6) Implementation of climate teams to ensure positive relationships for children and adults. This includes using data and real discussions about children to ensure all are known and connected
  - 7) Deep focus on striving learners and interventions for all students thru wrap around options
  - 8) Expansion and commitment to our partnerships to eradicate summer learning loss, ensure students are prepared for kindergarten, and provide enrichment and supports to students beyond the classroom
  - 9) Focus on restorative justice, discipline reforms and policy changes to reduce out of school suspensions and disproportionality
9. What role should standardized testing have in assessing students, teachers, and instructional methods?
- I believe that standardizes tests are imperfect but necessary instruments to provide a barometer of our success in the work we do for students. I don't believe they should be "hi-stakes" tests and don't believe that is the climate or approach taken by teachers and administrators in our district. I have seen how this data alongside classroom level observation and expertise can together be used to understand gaps and shift instruction. The work our district is doing now to equip administrators and educators to use this data effectively is truly transforming. The use of data by our school improvement teams and school climate teams – both qualitative and quantitative – has huge potential in helping us identify and execute on positive changes in the classroom and for students.

#### **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?
- I believe Principal Trish Murray and the Kingsley community (admittedly I am biased because its my children's school) have best articulated this vision. It shows students at the center of a circle of responsibility that includes teachers, parents, school and community all working together to support the needs of children. At the core, this is similar to Cradle to Career and other community partnerships because they all rest in organizations aligning more effectively to serve students and families.
11. What is your vision for the partnership between District 65 and District 202? Which areas of collaboration are most important and why?

My vision for our relationship is that we provide a seamless educational experience for all students from prek-high school graduation. Our most significant collaboration is the work we have been doing on creating a prek-12 trajectory of academic expectations and milestones, along with strategies on what we must do in both our districts to meet these expectations. We have done great work over the past four years with our joint literacy goal and more direct collaboration among our administrators and teachers. I think we now need to also focus on how our combined resources can be allocated to best prepare students to arrive at the high school ready to succeed. This will mean giving deep attention to the 6-9 transition vs. the 8-9 transition and what building blocks need to be in place to make sure the number of students who are able to access higher level course work at the high school is on the rise.

## **Part V - Budget**

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

I will continue to do the work that I have as Finance Chair and now Board president to articulate the Board's need for efficiencies and call on our Administration to create a plan of action to realize these efficiencies. As possible, I will also lend my personal expertise as an operational improvement consultant to help identify additional opportunities for savings and creatively work with our partners both at District 202 and in the community to share resources.

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

Budget cuts have already taken place with almost \$11M in reductions over the past seven years. The priority has been as it should be to preserve the classroom experience as much as possible. This premise is no longer possible. Therefore, I will prioritize maintaining programming for our most struggling and vulnerable students. I will prioritize maintaining our social emotional supports and range of services that enable the classroom teacher to do his/her job. I will prioritize commitments for coaching, professional development and other capacity building for our teachers. I will do my best to mitigate growth in classroom sizes but frankly believe this will be impossible to avoid. Therefore I would prioritize rationalizing our number of buildings over huge increases to class size if that tradeoff is possible.