



Indivisible Indiana District 1 School Board Candidate Questionnaire



Please send your replies to nmaspenson@gmail.com by
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1. What should be the school board's top priority in the coming term?

There are numerous issues that will face the South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) board in the coming 'term' (which I'm interpreting to mean as 2019 and 2020). As I've talked with many in the process of the campaign, these issues include:

- developing a short and long term solution to the issues related to busing students around the community and the related problems that ensue;
- improving morale among teachers and staff;
- updating teacher employment contracts to include better pay;
- continuing work to improve educational outcomes for students of color;
- broadening communications with the community, internal and external, to increase a sense of participation and commitment to South Bend schools;
- successful integration of the new curriculum that involves take-home tablets;
- encouraging more families to choose South Bend schools

Overlaying all these concerns is the need to prepare for and implement changes needed to address budget changes from the tax caps that are imminent, in order to stay fiscally strong and independent.

That's a lot to accomplish, but a school board has to have the capacity to manage a complex array of disparate and frequently competing interests, in collaboration with administrators and staff. I will encourage and engage closely in the launch of a new strategic planning process to begin at the end of the 2018-19 academic year, and make sure that the priorities noted above, along with those of the broader school community, are the kinds of priorities that gain exposure in that work.

2. What is your position on the role of charter and academy schools in the school district?

Charter schools are a reality in South Bend and other parts of the state, which is as a result of state policy. South Bend schools need to compete for both students and resources as a result. Since funding from state resources ties directly to the numbers of students, this reality encourages creation of a growth plan for South Bend schools.

Though decision making occurs far from here, it does not make the South Bend school community voiceless. The SBCSC can and should adopt a smart educational and advocacy role with public officials, for example, to level measures for school accountability, which has been biased towards private and charter schools. In addition, a proactive strategy should include a plan on how to inform our community about the variety of options South Bend has within the district, and how it can successfully provide for the diverse educational needs of our students. I am an experienced advocate with success lobbying for a variety of issues, a skill which I bring to the role if I am elected.

3. How should the school corporation deal with the problem of declining student population in South Bend Community Schools?

A concentration on simply improving that which the system offers for its current—and diminishing—student body will result only in slightly better managed decline. The South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) must develop strategies to be the schools of choice for families and students in our region.

I am advocating for a strategy of growth that reflects building on improved programming for current students and bringing new students to the SBCSC. Here are a sample of suggestions for reducing decline and eventually turning towards growth:

- **Marketing**: the SBCSC has a relatively new view on marketing itself to prospective students and their families. This is not simply a sales operation, with brochures and signs, but rather there is a need to deeply understand why families do and do not choose to have their children attend SB Schools. A good marketing plan will reach out to those who opt out of the South Bend schools and find out what their reason(s) are, bring that data to the SBCSC to better understand concerns, and target responses to best serve the diverse needs that are identified.
- **Early Childhood**: I am the candidate pushing for SBCSC participation in the development of quality, affordable pre-kindergarten services for children in the South Bend system. In addition to making the teaching lives of the educators much more effective as they have to deal with fewer educational deficits, the SBCSC has the ability to gain early commitment from families when it provides

children with a safe and happy learning environment; early adopters of South Bend schools are much more likely to stay with the system long term.

- **Collaborative Resource Development:** if elected to be a member of the SBCSC board, I'll use my wide community network of colleagues and partners to advocate for the system's engaging with other units of government, local and national foundations, and the private sector to increase student and school resources and to communicate with potential students and their families about these offerings.
 - **Engage with Economic Development:** The City of South Bend has, recently, been able to reverse population loss and experience minor residential growth. The process includes such strategies as: outreach to realtors; engaging businesses; creating 'place making' opportunities, such as improved parks, to make neighborhoods attractive; immigrant welcome; and facilitating new housing development. The SBCSC can learn from these efforts and play a critical role in propelling these efforts forward as we succeed.
4. What should our schools do, if anything, to protect students who have an undocumented status?

The schools have an important role in protecting students of any status, and I have worked closely with the South Bend schools and local partners to develop a response plan in the event of an immigration enforcement action. The schools are a form of sanctuary, and it is very important for all staff and faculty within the Corporation to know how to protect students while obeying the law.

An important training concern for South Bend school staff is to make sure they understand the schools' legal duties to protect information about all its students and, by extension, their families. In the training that we have developed, there are specific protocols that 'front line' staff must follow to ensure that they meet the requirements of the enforcement agency (ex: warrants vs. subpoenas vs. requests for information) and protect the schools, as well as the student and family information that it holds.

SBCSC schools provide a level of safety to both the students and their families, and they are a highly reliable source of important information to the entire community that they serve. This trusted status needs to be deployed to assist if there is an enforcement action, and the schools must continue to work with local faith, legal and community organizations to assist affected families. I strongly believe that the schools need to be a part of a response planning network that does not get it enmeshed in partisanship but respects the need to educate all students in the system.

5. What should be done about racial profiling and the school-to-prison pipeline in our schools?

Many of the issues that create a destructive pathway towards incarceration come from factors that occur to the families and community from which students come, including poverty, racism, and traumatic events. Students negatively impacted are disproportionately from minority backgrounds and have higher rates of diagnosed learning disabilities. Students who disrupt or act on inappropriately at school are often exhibiting reactions to these backgrounds, and the discipline applied can exacerbate the problem with suspensions and expulsions.

The SBCSC has committed to getting its teachers and staff to better understand and implement cultural competencies to reduce suspensions, and the Corporation needs to fully implement and support this training and measure results so that implementation can be adjusted to the continuing needs. Changing from a 'no-tolerance' policy is an excellent start. Increased resources for intervention in students' mental health issues, including understanding trauma and how implicit bias has impact in the school setting, will have long term positive results, but there are not enough counseling resources available.

I am a strong proponent of mentoring as a mitigating opportunity for our students and have offered training in working with students of colors that is a part of the evidence-based curriculum of the Mentoring Partnership. I helped launch the City's 'My Brother's Keeper' Initiative and positioned the community to submit a recent proposal to the Obama Foundation for grant funding (pending) for mentoring programming that would be placed in the South Bend schools. I am committed to this work regardless of the election; we need a broad-based community of trained mentors who will help to reduce profiling while raising understanding and outcomes for our youth.

If elected, I'll commit to working with the local community to build on these sources of appropriate care for SBCSC students, and to helping the SBCSC community to better understand needs of students affected by any kind of profiling.

6. What should be done about bullying in schools?

Bullying is reduced, and the opportunity for learning increased, when students affected by it are able to seek confidential and trusted help. SBCSC schools can and should provide an atmosphere where these kinds of interventions are acted upon quickly by qualified adults, and students feel safe with the results.

Many teachers and students note that much of the bullying occurring now is cyber-bullying, which creates a new challenge for the schools. While South Bend teachers and staff cannot be expected to monitor the online interactions of all its students, they can still engage students to make the environment conducive to having affected young

people feel comfortable relaying their fears. The anonymous tip line, which addresses bullying and other security concerns, is something I will promote.

Schools build local communities of trust at each building, and support for these efforts from the Board will be a continued aspect of my role with the SBCSC. I am highly involved with Indiana Youth Institute, which closely engages SBCSC, and will gladly offer my involvement to help make South Bend schools a beneficiary of their great help. Other external resources for assisting schools to create communities of care and response are widely available, and helping students to take the step of outreach to their teachers, counselors and principals will be a program that I will gladly support.

7. What should be done to educate and assist special needs or developmentally disabled individuals in the schools and community?

Services required by schools to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities are well defined by federal law and local policies. The SBCSC's goal must be to meet these minimum levels of education and work to best serve students through a culture of inclusion and independence. Most students who have an individualized education plan (IEP) are integrated into regular class settings with supports provided by the IEP. Settings in the community that normalize the experiences of disabled students, such as the regular classroom, are almost always the best place for the majority of students with disabilities.

Enhancing these in-school offerings are numerous community-based programs that SBCSC can and should collaborate with to provide a fully rounded experience for students with more pronounced disabilities. As a former professional in the disability field, and as someone who has worked with numerous disability organizations in the South Bend community, I will be an asset in helping special education program teachers and staff to collaborate with organizations that help them better serve their students and their families.