



## Indivisible Indiana District 2 School Board Candidate Questionnaire



Please send your replies to [nmaspenson@gmail.com](mailto:nmaspenson@gmail.com) by  
October 26, 2018

1. What should be the school board's top priority in the coming term?

**Create transparency** into the operations of the Corporation:

- **Restore the broadcast of the "hearing of visitors" at the end of each board meeting.** Most parents and school personnel don't have the ability to attend board meetings but they have a right to hear citizens of the community who make the time to express their concerns to the board.
- **Provide verbatim minutes of all board meetings.** Parents, teachers, and the community at large have a right to accurate, accessible written minutes of board discussion especially as it drives policy. The board used to post verbatim minutes but now provide only a written summary of items discussed and an online audio which is not easily accessible.
- **Review and Revise Board Policy 3112 regarding board and staff communications** to ensure teachers and staff have the ability to communicate freely with their school board representatives as is their right as voting, tax-paying citizens of this community.
- **Call for an investigation into the prevalence of sexual harassment** and sexual misconduct in our corporation, evaluate our responses to reports, and start a community dialogue for change. If we have learned nothing from the Kavanaugh hearings we know that sexual violence in middle and high school can cause trauma that has lasting effects into adulthood. As is the trend nation-wide, these incidents are under-reported in our district and, in fact, our state reporting requirements do not call for data on incidents of a sexual nature. We have to collect accurate data and make that data public, then organize a proactive community response to address these issues and help young people build skills to nurture healthy relationships.

**Identify additional resources to increase teacher pay.**

South Bend Community School Corporation is at a critical moment time - we must stop the flight of students from the district. This starts with a commitment to protecting our most important asset - teachers. If we are to attract and retain the most highly qualified, talented teachers, we must close the pay gap between South Bend Schools and surrounding districts. Money isn't everything but it is an important place to start. I am working with City leaders to learn more about how decisions made at the City level direct money away from the general fund, a critical

source of public school funding. We are recognizing that teachers provide the most fundamental building blocks for a highly skilled workforce and as such, it is in the interest of the City to invest in teachers as an investment in workforce development. We are considering options that could include using Tax Increment Financing (TIF dollars) to provide gap funding to increase teacher pay over the next three years to become the highest paid teachers in the region. Other ideas include incentive packages that have worked in other communities like priority housing.

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

My position is that they are not that much better than traditional public schools, but parents believe they are more viable options because of the reputation of South Bend public schools. All in all, the most important consideration is whether or not the masses of our children are receiving a quality education.

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

We need to understand that the corporation has been losing students for various reasons. Yes, the voucher system, charters, and private schools are receiving public money at the expense of our public school system, but we are also losing students to “push out” through zero tolerance discipline practices, disproportionate discipline in which children of color receive harsher punishment for the same behavior, as well as other negative experiences that communicate to families that they are not valued within the corporation.

I will work to:

4. Improve School Climate to Restore Our Families’ Trust in the District
  - a. Be open and honest about where we need to improve, validating and drawing on the experiences of parents and students.
  - b. Support the implementation of restorative practices as a means to improve relationships between teachers and families.
  - c. Ensure restorative mindset is embraced district-wide and is inclusive of community to build the learning partnership between the families and the district
5. Equip teachers with skills to teach a diverse student body
  - a. Children raised in poverty learn critical skills fundamental to academic success including resilience, creativity, and problem-solving. We must infuse the principles of asset-based teaching so our staff learns to identify and build on a student’s strengths.

- b. Give teachers skills to identify academic deficits and provide interventions to fill in gaps
  - c. Disproportionate discipline pushes students out of the corporation. We will reduce “push out” by helping teachers build relationships with students and increase their classroom management skills.
  - d. A positive school climate increases teacher morale and allows teachers the emotional space to build relationships with students and families. We must provide training in self-care so our teachers can model for our students pro-social skills such as self-regulation and healthy responses to stress and anxiety.
6. What should our schools do, if anything, to protect students who have an undocumented status?

It starts with education. We need to diversify our curriculum and start teaching our children true history and sharpening their critical thinking skills. We have to be intentional about teaching about race, gender, and the history of citizenship in our country. When we see signs that read, “No Human Being is Illegal” and “Migration is Beautiful,” we need to challenge all of our students to think critically about these messages so we can begin to change attitudes. This will help us create a better future. This isn’t a radical change, but it’s movement towards creating a better future.

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

There are several things that must be done: 1) acknowledge there is a problem; 2) develop a substantive strategic plan to address the school-to-prison pipeline, which should include plans for implementation and evaluation; 3) quarterly reporting on discipline data by race and gender; 4) devote more significant resources to the Department of African American Student and Parent Services.

8. What should be done about bullying in schools?

We need more effective programming around bullying, especially for LGBTQ youth in our schools. There should be more rigorous anti-bullying policies where restorative justice practices are used to foster understanding between students. Professional development around these issues is needed as well. Lastly, we need a climate study that asks students about bullying.

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

Again, I think we need to do a needs assessment for these students. I can argue that we need to improve our school building more accommodating for students special needs, make our buses more compatible, and improve teacher training and change our classroom environments so that we can promote more inclusivity, but those experiencing these issues best know what they need.

I would make a motion to form an advisory committee specifically around these. This committee would include specialists, parents, and students from each school.