

2023 School Board Questionnaire
Erica Valliant

1. What is your website and/or another way for delegates to reach you?

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2. What are your top priorities for the school district?

- a. My long-term vision for St. Paul Public Schools is for us to have a district that, as the second largest district in the state, is a model for others.
- b. That our staff is deeply dedicated, highly trained, valued, and equitably compensated.
- c. That the students of our city, diverse with many different cultures, languages, and all other representations, are equipped to be the best representatives, leaders, lawmakers, trailblazers, storytellers, historians, and visionaries for St. Paul.
- d. That we continue to invest in our students and families and the quality of our public education system.
- e. That the families, educators, and community members that are a part of the public education experience are valued, respected, and included.

3. How would you help improve student achievement?

- a. Support and invest in restorative Justice practices for use with students and with staff as a means of supporting students through emotionally difficult times and situations in a way that helps them build the protective factors needed to be able to focus on learning.
- b. Provide competency based learning/personalized learning opportunities for students and making sure staff have the tools, time, and resources to implement.
- c. Make sure that SPPS recruits and retains quality teaching and support staff.
- d. Working to ensure appropriate teacher/staff to student ratios in classrooms.
- e. Offering opportunities/programming for students to be involved in activities/programs that help foster a sense of pride, accountability, and responsibility for their education.

4. What is your plan to close the achievement gap?

- a. The first step is to ask better questions. Framing this as an achievement doesn't recognize the role of supremacist systems and frames it as students' responsibility. There is not an achievement gap; there is an opportunity gap.
- b. I will continue to support Ethnic Studies and advocate for including African American, African, and Indigenous histories, contributions, and viewpoints to be incorporated into the curriculum.

- c. Advocate for avenues to increase the number of teachers of color
- d. Invest in training for educators, building staff, and district staff around ACES, historical trauma, implicit biases, institutional racism, and how it works and shows up in society, in the community, and in the classroom.
- e. Support and invest in restorative Justice practices for use with students and with staff and district staff as a means of working in a healthier manner with each other.
- f. Advocate for the inclusion of financial literacy skills taught through the lens of “wealth justice,” which is described as the commitment to heal generational financial trauma, which has the largest influence on a person's wealth-building capability.

5. What is the best way to keep our kids safe in school?

- a. This is deeply personal to me as I have sons at Maxfield Elementary, Benjamin E Mays IB World School, and Hidden River Middle School as well as nieces and nephews in SPPS. It is heartbreaking that students are being harmed and are afraid in our schools. It is unacceptable that our places of learning are not being supported enough to create a space that is welcoming to all of the dimensions of well-being for our kids.
- b. Schools cannot be a place where kids are scared nor a place where they are policed. I do not support efforts that would only further facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline and the over-policing of black and brown students. We also know that these efforts have been tried, and they did not and will not work.
- c. What has been proven to work are community-driven solutions such as restorative justice practices. I am committed to advocating for full funding of restorative justice practices programming and needed supports for all of our schools.
- d. Additionally, we must invest in the critical student and educator supports so that we can provide a quality education in a safe working and learning environment. We cannot forget that our students’ learning environments are our educators’ working environments. We must also ensure adequate staffing levels so that the professionals serving our kids can do safely and can focus on instruction and connecting with young people.
- e. I will also personally be in our schools to help foster a culture of school pride, respect, & belonging with staff, students, and families as a school board member and require that district staff do the same on a regular quarterly basis.

6. Would you support distributing funds raised by parent-led groups across all schools to address the achievement gap and racial disparity?

- a. It is a critical role of our district to provide an equitable education to all of our students. Just as I was taught and I teach my kids, fair does not mean equal.
- b. Not every school needs the same thing and that is okay. If a school needs more to serve its students and families then I will fight for that school to get more funding in the budget. That is on elected leaders and those of us seeking to be elected to ensure that.
- c. While I'd be happy to distribute funds across schools or a percentage of funds raised personally, parent-led groups should have the freedom to make decisions

for themselves as to how the money they helped raise should be distributed. Parent led means honoring their support of a specific school community if they so choose. We should encourage parents and families to be leaders in partnership with school staff.

- d. I would love to start having conversations about how we can better include families and community members in collaborative budgeting and am open to creating a grant or seeding our Title One schools' PTOs with funds so they can invest in schools and encourage staff to connect with parents to assess a schools' best needs.

7. What is your stance on charter schools, and how do you believe they impact the public school system in terms of funding and resources?

- a. Parents choose schools with their feet. Some Saint Paul parents have chosen charter schools for the kids because SPPS has not offered them what they need. However, there are some concerning practices of schools opening and closing with little notice to the community or local agencies that create confusion and potentially affect young people meeting timely education goals.
- b. We must reject the market driven notion that charter schools will add competition and improve traditional public schools. This is not true. Most Charter schools aren't performing better than traditional public schools. Instead, funding has been drawn away from the traditional public schools as the population of public schools has declined.
- c. As such, I support a moratorium. However, our children deserve even more than a moratorium. We need to conduct research on why parents choose charter schools for their children and how the SPPS can make its schools even more relevant for their children and their family.
- d. As I talk to parents with children in charter schools, they tell me that they believe charter schools are more culturally relevant. SPPS can be more culturally relevant. Parents tell me x. SPPS can be x Parents tell me y. SPPS can be y. We need to build the base of support for our traditional public schools and we do that by making our schools more relevant to children and their families.

8. What are your thoughts on the Student Outcomes Focused Governance (SOFG) model? Do you support or oppose its adoption and implementation in our district?

- a. I support an amended version that is less stringent but offers structure and is tailored for the needs of St. Paul.

9. What are your thoughts on sustainability initiatives in schools, such as solar installations on school buildings?

- a. Our children will inherit a planet ravaged by the effects of climate change if we do not act with greater urgency on the necessary climate goals.

- b. As such, I support any initiative that encourages sustainability, combats climate change, and helps create a just transition as we shift to greener practices.
- c. They are also excellent ways to engage students on the science of an initiative (such as how solar panels work while seeing them on a school site, for example) and learn about our collective responsibilities in supporting sustainability.