

D86, president candidates profiled

Five seek four seats on school board; two vie to lead the village



Voters will have choices in two races when they head to the polls Tuesday, April 4.

Four candidates for the Hinsdale High School District 86 Board — Kevin Camden, Keith Chval, Robin Gonzales and Nancy Pollak — have organized as the #vision86 slate. James “Fred” Hoch is running as a write-in candidate.

In the village president race, two-term Trustee Laura La Placa is running against two-term Village President Tom Cauley.

The information listed below was taken from questionnaires submitted by candidates.

— by Pamela Lannom and Ken Knutson

District 86 board



Kevin Camden

Background

Age: 45
Years in district: 19
Attendance area: South
Education: BA in economics, Northern Illinois University; JD, John Marshall Law School
Occupation: attorney, Camden Law Office LLC
Community service: Cass District 63 Foundation member (14 years), Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish Council (3 years), Darien Lions Club (9 years); former Tri-State Fire Protection District commissioner; Scout Leader, Pack 97 (7 years)
Board experience: Alpha Kappa Lambda fraternity national president (2010-14), vice-president (2008-10), director (2006-08); Alpha Kappa Lambda Educational Foundation director (2010-15)

Qualifications

Camden has worked with public entities throughout his legal career and has negotiated collective bargaining agreements for unions and management for various public bodies. He has watched the development of educational opportunities through his involvement with the Cass Elementary District 63 Foundation.

Why is he running?

Camden wants to help maintain and improve the district's standing so every child, including his three children, has the same educational opportunities generations of students have enjoyed.

He believes work must be done to repair the dichotomy that exists between the two schools and that board must lead in word and action.

“I believe the board needs to act not only in the fiduciary best interest of the district, but also can set a tone of civility and service that can also be a learning o



Keith Chval

Background

Age: 54
Years in district: 52
Attendance area: Central
Education: BS in marketing, Indiana University; JD, IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law
Occupation: co-owner, Protek International Inc., consultant
Community service: church vestry member, deacon, missions, youth leader; youth coach
Board experience: Caucus 86, chair (2 years), nominating committee chair (2 years); Clarendon Hills Lions Club president, board member

Qualifications

Chval's work on Caucus 86 exposed him to how a school board should properly function and the benefit of bringing multiple perspectives into the process. He said his community service experiences have given him a strong understanding of the community and its broad interests.

Why is he running?

A Central graduate and parent of five, Chval said he's long been interested in the district.

“I became greatly concerned over the past several years as I've observed the dysfunction that has existed on the board and how that has trickled down to affect the administration, staff and students, to the point of threatening the reputation for excellence that each school has earned and even creating divisiveness in the community,” he said.

He and his slate will work to establish a properly functioning board and serve the district's best interests in a collaborative and respectful way.

“The timing is right for me, and I look forward to working toward those ends.”



Robin Gonzales

Background

Age: 45
Years in district: 3
Attendance area: Buffer zone
Education: BA in secondary education and education technology
Occupation: chief education officer, Zia Learning Education Technologies
Community service: director, eGRAD (dropout prevention program); chair, Chicago Student Non-Violence Summit
Board experience: IB (International Baccalaureate) Illinois Implementation Board; Illinois Computing Educators Board; chair, iNACOL Standards for Teaching in 21st Century Classroom; Chicago Public Schools Board, director of online and digital education

Qualifications

As a veteran educator with more than 15 years of classroom teaching and district-level experience, Gonzales has overseen education technology programs at 600 schools. She also is the CEO of a company that provides teacher training and digital learning across the country.

Why is she running?

District 86 is known for excellence and yet is facing challenges and obstacles.

“There are critical choices and decisions to be made, and I am committed to ensuring that students are at the heart of these decisions,” she said. “Ensuring access to high-quality education programs that meet students' individual needs at both Hinsdale Central and South is my top priority.”



James “Fred” Hoch

Background

Age: 46
Years in district: 12
Attendance area: South
Education: BA, UCLA; MA, George Washington University
Occupation: CEO, Illinois Technology Association; founder/general partner, TechNexus Venture Collaborative
Community service: various charitable organizations
Board experience: various tech and community organizations

Qualifications

Professionally Hoch has managed the disparate interest of hundreds of executives to find consensus to move forward. As an entrepreneur, he looks at the world not as it is but how it can be, despite the challenges to do so.

Why is he running?

“In my opinion, the district lacks engaged leadership that is willing to make tough choices that are in the best long-term interest of the students and the district,” he said. “I also have the first of my three children entering next year and I want to be assured that they, along with their fellow students, are getting the best education possible.”



Nancy Pollak

Background

Age: 54
Years in district: 18
Attendance area: Central
Education: BS, Indiana University, MA in education, DePaul University
Occupation: community volunteer
Community service: AYSO coach; Community Speaker Series co-founder; Night at the Net Charity Tennis Tournament founder; Sunday school teacher; volunteer at West Suburban Humane Society, PADS, Elm School PTO, HMS, HCHS
Board experience: board member, D181 Foundation, No Barriers; former president, Elm and Central PTOs; former board member, Foundation Fighting Blindness

Qualifications

Pollak cited her experience building consensus among a large number of constituents who have disparate needs and concerns. She also pointed to her master's degree in education and said as the parent of three graduates, she has no personal motivation to serve, just a desire to give back.

Why is she running?

She is running because she believes the past several boards have let special interests and personal agenda items drive the conversation.

“I believe we have a strong administrative team in place that could perform at a high level if supported by a cohesive board,” she said. “I have the time necessary to dedicate to this position and am thrilled to be part of a slate of candidates who are committed to working together (along with the existing board members) in a respectful and productive manner for the betterment of our school communities.”

Hinsdale village president



Tom Cauley

Background

Age: 61
Years in village: 27
Education: BBA in accountancy, magna cum laude, University of Notre Dame; JD, magna cum laude, University of Illinois College of Law
Occupation: attorney/partner, Sidley Austin LLP
Board experience: eight years as village president, two years as village trustee, served on Ogden Avenue Task Force

Qualifications

An attorney specializing in financial litigation, Cauley points to his training as an asset in understanding complex financial and legal issues facing the village as well as in working to resolve disputes. His background in accounting, he adds, also helps in addressing the village's fiscal and budgetary matters.

Why is he running?

Cauley said fighting the widening of I-294 into Hinsdale and helping the village navigate potential resulting fallout was a major factor in his decision to seek a third term.

“I want to continue doing a good job for Hinsdale residents. There are several important challenges facing Hinsdale, and I believe I am the best person to address those challenges. Residents could lose backyards, parkland and the Hinsdale Oasis, which is our largest sales tax generator,” he said. “I plan to call upon my 35-years of experience as a litigator, and all of the contacts that I have made in my eight years as village president, to fight the widening of I-294 into our neighborhoods.”



Laura LaPlaca

Background

Age: 60
Years in village: 28
Education: BA from Illinois Wesleyan University; JD from Loyola University of Chicago School of Law
Occupation: attorney (retired)
Community service: Hinsdale 2025 SEG-Downtown member 2006; Girl Scout leader, 1992-2009; Oak School consultant, room parent and PTO volunteer; Union Church of Hinsdale Sunday School teacher, VBS leader, co-chair of senior minister search committee

Board experience: village trustee, 2009-present; plan commission member, 1997-2009 (chair, 2004-09)

Qualifications

LaPlaca said her nearly eight years of experience as a village trustee has equipped her with an understanding of village operations, a good working relationship with village staff and confidence in her strengths as an effective leader.

Why is she running?

“Running for village president is the logical next step in my career of village service,” she said. “I served on the plan commission during some contentious periods of development in the village, such as 55th and County Line, First and Garfield and the Ogden Office Park development. Those proposed projects necessitated that I manage opposing viewpoints and involved lengthy deliberations — always with the goal of balancing the interests of the code, the community and individual residents.”

She also said the time is right for the office to change hands. “Diversity in leadership and fresh ideas is critical to the success of any community.”

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