

D181 candidates share their views

Five seek election to the four open seats on the elementary school board



Where do the candidates stand on the issues?

Ken Knutson compiled these responses from personal interviews and questionnaires.



Keith Bram



Sinead Duffy



Sarah Jakobsen



William Merchantz



Sheetal Rao

Most pressing budgetary matter

<p>Harvesting public support for tax levies are necessary to ensure children in D181 remain competitive. The district needs to make sure it's getting the appropriate return on its investment and direct money where there are deficiencies.</p>	<p>The key to fiscal oversight is managing both sides of the equation, both cost and revenue. The district needs to plan and manage for the long term, not take short-term actions that may cause fiscal challenges for future boards to address.</p>	<p>The outcome of the District 86 referendum, pass or fail, will have an impact on District 181. Expenses will need to be carefully examined in light of the outcome to ensure that District 181 continues to thrive.</p>	<p>With more than 83 percent of the budget spent on personnel, both sides in the current negotiations for a new teachers contract must listen to each other to reach a mutually acceptable agreement, as was the case with last year's HESS contract.</p>	<p>With the contract for teacher salaries up for renegotiation, it is crucial the district keep its superb educators engaged and committed to providing a top-notch education to students while working within its budgetary means.</p>
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District's greatest strength, area of need

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greatest strength — students • area of need — more attention should be given to improving interpersonal communication among community members, with less reliance on social media; and to developing a more robust STEM curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greatest strength — having staff and fiscal stability in place to implement strategic plan • area of need — even out existing STEM instruction across the district and deliver that curriculum to all students, perhaps through partnerships with private entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greatest strength — community's high level of interest and high expectations regarding the education of district students, coming from parents and other interested residents • area of need — the district needs to leverage technology to better assist children with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greatest strength — people, from the superintendent and district administrators to school staff to parents and taxpayers • area of need — ensuring a modern and consistent curriculum in safe and well-maintained schools, along with long-range financial sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greatest strength — involved and committed parents, many of whom moved to the community for the school district • area of need — provide more volunteer opportunities and exposures to foreign languages and cultures so children learn about those with different backgrounds
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Recent board decisions

<p>He said he was uncomfortable giving his opinion on matters on which his knowledge is limited and insufficient.</p>	<p>She believes that as a body, the current board has strived to be objective, transparent and fiscally responsible in the decisions they have made, although she may not agree with every board member on every decision made.</p>	<p>She supports the actions of the current board, crediting it with making educated and well-reasoned decisions based on the information available and a keeping the big picture in mind. She could not identify a recent decision with which she disagreed.</p>	<p>Voted to send an additional \$181,000 to the municipal pension fund (IMRF) to reduce the outstanding pension liability. Disagreed with the termination of former superintendent Don White's contract, but noted that the hiring of Hector Garcia has produced good results.</p>	<p>She agreed with the decision to use RIT scores rather than percentiles for math placement in third grade to achieve more appropriate level identification. The vote to decrease funding around SELAS needs was disappointing because kids need social emotional learning support.</p>
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Top three priorities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educating others • listening to others • cultivating healthy relationships with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to implement the strategic plan • take a data-driven approach when considering terms for new teachers contract • make decisions that help short-circuit potential future financial difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to understand, triage and meet the needs of district families • to maintain the high academic standards expected by the community • to better leverage technology to advance the schools and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete the teacher contract negotiation • oversee and support Academic Success priorities and projects • oversee and support an improved strategic financial plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent the best interests of children and parents of the district • use the taxpayers' resources responsibly to maintain the level of excellence expected • read, ask questions and keep an open mind
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