

D86 hopefuls give views on key topics

Five seek three open seats on the Hinsdale High School District 86 Board

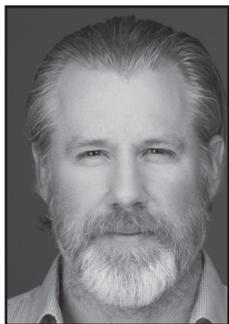


Where do the candidates stand on the issues?

Ken Knutson compiled these responses from personal interviews and questionnaires.



Asma Akhras



Andrew Catton



Kay Gallo



Cat Greenspon



Debbie Willoughby

Alignment between two schools

The district needs to have curricular and grading alignment to promote accountability. The strategic plan's alignment efforts should continue, including assessment alignment. Formative assessments should be given more weight under the new grading system to encourage students to track their learning.

Alignment should be pursued where it makes sense, but diversity also may be appropriate in certain areas based on the needs and wants of students. The strategic plan's one-size-fits-all approach is not targeted enough and fails to prioritize individual student needs within a student population.

The two high schools have distinct characteristics and having uniformity in grading and curriculum serves no one. The alignment process has been rolled out haphazardly, with no pilots for grading changes, and caused confusion for students and families. Teachers are being asked to do too much.

Choice of academic offerings should be the same. The board in partnership with the administration should define the minimum number of students needed to run a class. Grading policy, including weight of summative and formative assessments, should be instituted at the district level.

Aligning the curriculum and grading practices is important. Having consistency takes pressure off the teachers and promotes fairness for students. Creative and fiscally responsible ways to ensure students at both schools receive similar opportunities despite the enrollment gap should be explored.

Qualities of a new superintendent

The person should be able to connect with the community and listen to stakeholder voices while ensuring student learning is the top priority. Experience as a superintendent in a district similar to D86 is important, as is a doctorate, and the person should understand student assessments and have a vision for improving standardized test results.

The person should hold a doctorate and have at least 10 years of experience as a superintendent, preferably with a track record of academic and operational school improvement. New superintendent should offer better fiscal stewardship and should be identified in nationwide search.

District should work with a search firm and input from stakeholders to find new leader, who should have experience serving as a superintendent and be well-spoken and thoughtful. How he/she presents himself/herself to all stakeholders is important.

The person should have experience as a superintendent in a destination district like D86 and a proven track record of fostering positive relations with the community, fellow administrators and teachers. A doctorate is preferred.

The person should have a doctorate, superintendent experience and strong communication skills to effectively articulate district actions to the community. An ability to navigate adversity is important, as is vision, leadership and a passion for education, students and staff.

District finances

The district's financial health is fairly strong. Today's decisions impact the district for years to come, so spending must be efficient, carefully managed and with students' academic growth as the priority. Plan ahead for infrastructure needs to avoid additional referendums and emphasize collaboration and transparency.

Three responsibilities of a board member

The district needs to identify opportunities for cost reductions. The referendum projects are over budget, and spending millions on for the off-site Transition Center made little sense, especially since existing facilities are underutilized. The administrative structure is bloated and expanding and well overdue for some lean activity. Wiser deployment of resources will lead to improved student learning and growth.

District finances appear to be stable. Implementing zero-based budgeting across departments was a good decision. Terms of the proposed teachers' contract, which has yet to be ratified, will be a factor. The inability to staff all positions has allowed the district to save money but at a cost to students.

The district is solvent this school year, but with large increases in transportation and utility costs, and not knowing details of the teacher's contract, the upcoming years will be tighter than normal. Budget line items that have not been spent in the last two fiscal years should be reduced.

The district is in good financial health. But recent reversals of prior board decisions have resulted in unnecessary expenditures. The district is wrapping up a large capital investment this year, but continued investment in facilities is important to ensure they are adequately maintained.

Top responsibilities of a board member

1. Hiring a superintendent and managing his/her performance in ensuring academic excellence and developing of a new strategic plan
2. Overseeing district finances and acting as good stewards of constituents' tax dollars
3. Building collaboration and trust among all stakeholders, including administrators, board members, staff, parents, students and taxpayers

1. Oversee district leadership
2. Respect the voice of the community
3. Provide proper stewardship, creating value in line with community expectations of excellence in education

1. Hiring a superintendent
2. Setting measurable performance goals for the superintendent and holding him/her accountable
3. Providing robust curricular programming for students that meets their individual needs in a fiscally responsible manner

1. Governance
2. Fiscal responsibility to ensure the community's investment in the school district is spent as close to students as possible
3. Building trust with students, employees and the community

1. Provide oversight to the district
2. Ensure the administration has thoroughly worked through proposals before implementation
2. Provide guidance on the district's strategic vision and priorities

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