

**2019 ICCSD Chat Questionnaire: Please return by October 1st, 2019.**

Thank you for running for school board! Please explain why you have chosen to run for school board at this time and how your work and/or volunteer experiences would be an asset to the board. Please explain your understanding of the job duties and the role of the school board (feel free to reference [Iowa Code 280.14](#)).

As a first-generation college student, I am passionate about public education, partly because I know its power to improve lives. I want to make sure that all students in our district have the same excellent opportunities regardless of their financial status, zip code, race, or disability.

I've been active with my children's schools and in discussions of pressing issues in the district for the past seven years. I am currently the Lucas Elementary representative to the Districtwide Parent Organization and for two years served as secretary of the Lucas PTO. I also served as the Lucas representative on the transition committee for the new Hoover building, on the ICCSD calendar committee, and on the hiring committee for the Lucas Elementary principal.

I am knowledgeable about school board policies and practices and can speak to all issues facing our district. My broad range of advocacy shows that I will never be a candidate who is only knowledgeable about one issue (safety issues, finances, school closings, or redistricting), but one who can speak to all issues facing our district with solid analysis, evidence-based reasoning, and moral clarity.

I've also written for local media on topics including [how the school board should function](#), [justice considerations in education](#) (particularly regarding bussing and class sizes) and [budget cuts](#). I also actively campaigned in favor of the 2017 general obligation bond.

In short, I will be a quick study who adjusts well to the demands of being a board member.

**DISTRICT SAFETY:** The school district has convened a safety committee and they recently came up with several recommendations. Among the recommendations were:

1. Place a SRO (School Resource Officer) at each secondary building (possible cost: \$750,000 a year).
2. Form a threat assessment team.
3. Universal Mental Health Screening of all students

1. Do you support placing SROs in school buildings? Why or why not?

ICCSD policies should be based on the best evidence and not on the personal feelings of a select few. The best research (i.e., metareviews) on school resource officers (SROs) show that officers stationed on campus do not reduce the risk of violence, increase safety, or improve the school climate. Given our current school climate data, adding an officer could worsen the educational experiences of our black, brown, and differently-abled students.

2. Do you support forming a threat assessment team in our district? Why or why not? Does a threat assessment team require at least one SRO/police officer for the district to employ?

The district does need a comprehensive threat-assessment policy and training for relevant faculty and staff. This needs to include a consistent procedure for classifying and responding to threats and an outline of what actions to take, primarily including wrap-around support in the school and community for the student in crisis. It should not include an armed police officer stationed on school grounds, but should include open lines of communication between the threat assessment team and local police.

3. Do you support Universal Mental Health screening of all students? Explain why or why not. Explain the potential risks and benefits of implementing such a program. Should parents/students be required to opt IN to the screening as opposed to most other surveys where parents/students must opt OUT?

The district needs to have a mental health support plan similar to its suicide prevention plan. I don't have strong opinions about how the screenings should be done.

4. Some members of the black and Special Education community have expressed concerns about all of the Safety Committee recommendations being likely to disproportionately and negatively impact their children. Please respond to these concerns.

I have heard those concerns and it informs my understanding of the threat assessment team and armed police officers stationed in our schools. Apart from an armed officer stationed in our schools, I believe a more rigorous and consistent policy for how we handle threats will be significantly better for our black, brown, and special education students.

5. How does the implementation of these 3 recommendations affect school culture? Is this the best place to spend limited money?

Yes, implementing these three recommendations would affect school culture as I explain above. I'm also not in favor of spending funds on a threat assessment officer or a school resource officer at this time.

#### **ACADEMIC OUTCOMES/SCHOOL CULTURE:**

6. What ideas do you have for improving the academic outcomes of all students in this district, especially for student populations for which a large academic performance gap exists?

- (a) Does student behavior at the individual level, as well as at the building level, impact achievement? If yes, what can be done to improve student behavior to benefit all students' academic achievement? If your answer is no, explain why not.
- (b) Do you favor a ban on student cell phones between first and last bells? Please explain why or why not, and explain how cell phones advance the mission of the district with respect to increasing achievement and promoting a positive school culture.
- (c) How important is curriculum and instructional materials in improving academic outcomes? How large of a role should the board play in approving curriculum and selecting instructional materials including textbooks?

I believe a good board will set a clear vision and clear goals, while expecting the administration to fulfill those goals. Since I've been in the ICCSD, the board has neither set clear goals (outcomes to be achieved), nor rank ordered them in a clear and precise way. That is one reason that the board often gets bogged down in minutiae and ends up focusing its time on matters like boundaries, facilities, busing, and so forth (all important topics), and spends little time talking about core educational issues. But I don't think the board should be involved in making decisions about cell phones or particular kinds of curriculum. Instead, they should set a goal and hold the administration accountable for achieving that goal. I believe one of the primary goals needs to be reducing the achievement gap by bringing the bot tom up. That means substantially improving proficiency rates for our black, brown, low -income, and special education students, and it means that we need to identify, track, and improve student academic growth, even if the student is not proficient. It means getting teachers and staff to buy in to the idea that, together, we can make a difference. For both accountability purposes and informing our teaching practices, we need substantially better data management, collection, and analysis.

7. Do you believe the switch to electronic textbooks is helpful or harmful to student learning? Is this switch worth paying nearly 4 times as much for the Amplify science curriculum (as an example) which costs about twice as much for less than half the duration/life cycle of physical textbooks? Explain your answer.

See my previous answer, but I haven't seen evidence supporting either that it is helpful or harmful. I would give the administration and curriculum committees wide latitude so long as we are meeting our goals.

8. What can the board do to improve the experiences of students and teachers in our district in addition to reviewing results from the student climate survey and academic proficiency reports?

The board can set a clear vision and set of goals for the district and consistently work to implement that vision. Such an approach can empower our faculty and staff to explore innovative strategies for accomplishing goals. One such goal is improving proficiency and growth rates. The board also needs to ensure that we have adequate data for evaluating whether we have achieved our goals.

**SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS:** State law allows school board directors to be elected by district (see [Iowa Code 275.12](#)) instead of all being elected “at large”. Changing to electing directors by district would likely result in guaranteeing at least one director from North Liberty, and at least one from Coralville. It could also increase the likelihood of electing director(s) from our smaller municipalities of Hills and University Heights.

9. Is it desirable to guarantee diverse municipal representation on the school board? Why or why not?

It is great to have diverse municipal representation on the school board, since a board hailing from a small subset of the district could very well be myopic about student needs. But it is not good to guarantee it, since doing so could very well result in myopic representatives who only care about their part of the district.

10. Would you be willing to put a question on the ballot that will give voters the choice about whether school board directors should be elected by district? Why or why not?

No, I think all school board candidates need to be for the whole district, not just for their own municipality.

**BUDGET:** Recent major budget cuts have negatively impacted educational programming and class sizes. What are your priorities for spending money from the general fund? What values would guide you in spending the newly extended SAVE tax dollars? Examples of how budget cuts in recent years have harmed students’ education include but are not limited to:

1. Some board approved classes were cut in May after student registration,
2. Quality/experienced teachers were enticed into early retirement at ongoing costs to the residents of this district through a higher property tax levy to be able to pay for their early retirements,
3. Elimination of all discretionary busing except for higher poverty areas,
4. Elimination of 4th grade orchestra,
5. Elimination of the 7th grade world language program, the entire German language program, and
6. Increases in class sizes.

11. What are your priorities in spending when the district budget improves? Class size reduction? Restoring programs that have been cut? Adding new programs such as constructing, staffing, and busing preschool students to preschool centers; or would you prefer to focus spending on the state mandated K -12 education program?

One of my chief values is that we should organize our educational system in such a way that it benefits all, especially our most vulnerable students. I believe one of the district’s chief goals should be to ensure that any inequalities are designed to benefit those who are least well off (e.g., attendance support busing for low-income populations). With state funding increases regularly below our annual cost increases, the district has been forced to make substantial budget cuts that have increased class sizes and cut programming in both 2014 and 2019. Since about 84% of the ICCSD budget is dedicated to teachers and staff, finding ways to save money in my mind is really about improving class sizes or offering new innovative programming.

12. What values would guide you in spending the next pot of SAVE money? Should the district reserve a significant amount of this money? Or should the district spend all available future penny sales tax income through 2050 on buildings in the next 5-10 years?

For me, it would primarily depend on the degree of need. If the building or renovation is a clear need, I’m comfortable spending SAVE money.

13. Would you recommend examining the non-classroom and administrative staffing levels to determine if there are any excesses there to cut in order to have more money for classroom education?

The ICCSD has some of the lowest administrative staffing levels in the state. It should certainly be considered, but the administration is very lean. In fact, I think there are essential administrative duties that haven't been adequately done (e.g., data collection, management, and analysis) because of understaffing.

**PERL:** In the last year, the board has discussed adding a PERL tax (Public Education and Recreation Levy). While it was decided to not be placed on the November 2019 ballot to the voters, it is likely that this tax will be placed on the November 2021 ballot. The board has decided to delay the vote to ensure they have adequate time to prioritize how to spend the roughly \$800,000 a year this tax would collect.

15. Are you in favor of adding another property tax to support public education and recreation?

Yes.

16. What would you want to spend this money on should the measure pass?

The funds should be used to make all school playgrounds inclusive for differently -abled children and equitable between schools. We are already moving in that direction as a district, but the funds currently come from PPEL, which limits some funds available for the Facilities Master Plan, building maintenance, and so forth.

**FMP 2.0:** The original facilities master plan (FMP) has been the guide to the timing of the tax-payer funded projects from 3 different sources of tax revenue: (1) the bond money (from a property tax levy passed in 2017) and (2) the SAVE tax money (Securing an Advanced Vision for Education money from the penny sales tax) and (3) PPEL tax money (Physical Plant and Equipment Levy funds from a property tax levy). The goal was to bring (nearly) all of our school buildings up to modern standards including air conditioning with a goal of better "building equity", and also to add additional space throughout the district. Due to the acceleration of the original FMP, it will be completed before the term is up for those to be elected in this election. This has led to discussion of needing to prioritize projects of a second FMP, sometimes referred to as FMP 2.0.

17. What should FMP 2.0 look like? If the voters reject the proposal to demolish Hoover Elementary, would you consider retaining the building to be used for some other district purpose? What projects would you like to be done in the next 5-10 years? Be sure to address if you would favor switching over to middle schools in FMP 2.0 despite FMP 1.0 being built around adding over 2500 K-6 seats (i.e. it was structured around a 7-8 junior high model following community feedback indicating a strong preference for 7-8 junior highs). Please state your reasons for or against switching to middle schools.

FMP 2.0 should include high-priority projects. The most obvious need is to provide Hills with the renovations that the rest of the elementary schools received. I am in favor of moving forward with the current design plans for City High, although that means that the old Hoover building will be demolished (pending the Iowa Supreme Court's decision). I am open to the idea of middle schools, largely because it will likely improve academic achievement from 6th-8th grade. If we did move to a middle school model, we would also likely need to build a 4th middle school and eliminate the straight feeder system we currently have. Furthermore, a middle school approach could free up space for pre-K classes in our elementary schools. However, I realize that pre-Ks in our elementary schools would need to have full-day care to be a viable option for many parents. These are all questions that should be considered through careful deliberation and in light of an overarching vision for the district in FMP 2.0.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** Given all the topics covered in this questionnaire and/or brought up by you, please prioritize at least the top three most important to address in the first two years of your term should you be elected.

1. The board needs to have a clear vision and rank-ordered goals that can inform decision making. This is crucial for a strong working relationship between board members and the administration, and that will help ensure that we are an attractive district for high-level administrators and the best teachers and staff in the state.
2. The board needs to make academic excellence a clear priority for all our students. That is, we need to make significant progress in reducing the achievement gap.
3. The district needs to have substantially better data collection, management, and analysis to inform decision making.