

**2021 DAVENPORT COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please complete this questionnaire by 5:00 pm on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 and submit your completed questionnaire via email to tpaone@isea.org. You may use a separate file or attachment for your answers. All candidate questionnaires shall be converted to a PDF file and made available on the Davenport Education Association's web page and social media posts, irrespective of whether you receive the DEA's recommendation or not. Any candidate who does not turn in a completed questionnaire by the date and time requested shall not be considered a viable candidate for recommendation. Your signature and date below indicate you understand these conditions.

Allison L. Beck
(Candidate's name - please print)


(Candidate's signature)

9.27.2021
(Date)

1. ~~(CHALLENGER) Tell us a bit about yourself, your background/experience, and your connection and/or interest in the Davenport Schools. What are your reasons for seeking this position?~~

(INCUMBENT) What are your reasons for seeking reelection?

When I was elected to the Davenport school board four years ago, I was thrilled, but I quickly realized how complex a position it is. I only felt that I was comfortable after about two years, when I had enough confidence to stand up to a board president who was an obstructionist and I began to really understand the nuances of school finance, special education, and student achievement. During that time, the District was cited for some egregious violations in Special Education and disproportionality in discipline, where Keystone Academy had essentially been turned into a place not for students with diagnosed behavioral issues, but anyone who teachers couldn't or wouldn't deal with in their home schools.

Since that time, I have been part of pandemic-driven emergency policy-making, participated in all of the IASB training designed to help the school board function more cohesively, actively pushed for data-driven decision making, developed a strong working relationship with many administrators, the superintendent, and the IASB (in my role as chair of the Policy Committee), and pushed through a resolution against voucher legislation (public money belongs in public schools).

More importantly, I have gotten to know teachers and staff and more parents in the district, and I feel that I have been a vocal advocate for all of our students, teachers and staff. I take the time to hear what people are saying and make informed decisions that have the best interest of all of our students and teachers at their center. Specifically:

i. I would like to continue the efforts of the Davenport schools to serve the whole child (Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health) by serving students AND the communities around the schools, particularly in areas where services are lacking and students are in disadvantaged or unstable situations.

ii. I plan to continue the push for data-based decision making in student achievement. Education in general has a problem with “program-jumping” and I expect our District to work with a program or solution with fidelity for at least a few years before changing to something else. If the data show that a program is working in one school, we should try to replicate that program in other schools. If a program is failing, or has a negative impact, then we should not be afraid to make changes. In addition, I want to see more input from those in the classroom—students, teachers, paras, and other staff—before we make large changes to curriculum or programming. In particular, I have been asking for an emphasis on early literacy for three years now, and we finally have that emphasis, I look forward to ensuring that ALL Davenport schools students read at or above grade level or to their fullest potential. Unfortunately, students lost significant amounts of learning during the pandemic, particularly students of color or students who were already struggling. We need to do better and make better decisions for them.

iii. Along with other Districts in the nation, we are dealing with the influx of federal stimulus money due to the pandemic, a short time to spend it, and huge educational losses, aftereffects and trauma in our children from the pandemic. I want to help the district use that money wisely, effectively, and quickly. Ideally, I’d like to see some of the money targeted at literacy and math skills—our students need remediation and intensive assistance to make up for a lot of lost time. This is particularly a problem for our youngest students and our students who were already struggling. For example, just because we can only pay people for two years doesn’t mean we shouldn’t hire them: if our students need interventionists, coaches or counselors now, we need to pay for them. Two years of assistance in reading goes a long way toward making up that learning gap.

Ultimately, I am running for school board again because I truly believe **all children** deserve a safe environment that challenges them to meet their fullest potential, to think critically about the world around them, and to care about others in order to become productive members of our society.

2. *What are some major issues that you believe our school district is currently facing and how would you like the district to deal with those issues?*

I think I might be repeating myself, but there are four issues that come to mind immediately:

i. The state takeover of the District; I have been a part of the training and shift toward a more efficient and thoughtful approach to running our district. The state has control, still, but we are going to be released to our own abilities soon. That means that we need board members who are up to speed on all of the important aspects of running a school district—from finance to disproportionality in discipline to student achievement. I am

confident that the training I have received has allowed me to contribute to the ability of the District to receive full accreditation.

ii. The District is currently dealing with a lot of animosity over masks and vaccinations against Covid-19. These are, in my mind, relatively temporary issues. More importantly, we have students regularly involved in, or the victims of, gun violence, physical violence, or other criminal activity. We have families who expect excellent “customer service” and we are falling short—those families who can open enroll out will open enroll out now that we have no voluntary diversity plan. (An example of this poor “customer service” is the way that registration for 7th grade courses was rolled out to 6th graders last year. It was haphazard, and lacked the ability for parent input). There are many, many excellent activities, programs, and opportunities in the Davenport schools, but our ability to make those apparent to the public has been lacking. We have made strides in the last two years (especially with the addition of professional marketing services) but we still have a lot of work to do.

iii. Along with other districts in the nation, we are dealing with the influx of federal stimulus money due to the pandemic, a short time to spend it, and huge educational losses, aftereffects, and trauma in our children from the pandemic. I want to help the district use that money wisely, effectively, and quickly. Ideally, I’d like to see some of the money targeted at literacy and math skills—our students need remediation and intensive assistance to make up for a lot of lost time. This is particularly a problem for our youngest students and our students who were already struggling. For example, just because we can only pay people for two years doesn’t mean we shouldn’t hire them: if our students need interventionists, coaches or counselors now, we need to pay for them. Two years of assistance in reading goes a long way toward making up that learning gap.

iv. Improving early literacy and disproportionality in discipline and student achievement. There is ample research that shows that students who are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade are at a much lower risk of behavioral issues, dropping out, and academic difficulties. I have been pushing for a focus on getting our students to be reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade for several years, yet we are just now starting to see that happen. The addition of the pandemic has only made the disparities in students’ abilities to read even more stark. Improving early literacy is a step toward reducing disproportionality in discipline, as students who can read are less likely to “disengage” or feel lost.

The next part requires a shift in thinking—the District has been focused on poverty, but I think what we really should be focusing on is how we can see each student as an individual who has potential, and is not limited by circumstances. Telling people that our students are poor and have high barriers to success sends the wrong message. It’s almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. We need to be better at recognizing and celebrating diversity through culturally responsive teaching, welcoming practices and policies, and yes, working to alleviate ACEs. But rather than focusing on the barriers to success, however, we should be highlighting the unique opportunities in the DCSD that are available for ALL students. By continuing to work on the programs that we are already doing that lift

up those students with obstacles to success, while at the same time reaching out to our community to ask for feedback and to highlight our strengths, will help us to being to shift away from a “can’t” attitude to more of a “can” attitude.

There are other issues, but I have chosen to highlight four here, and I am happy to discuss other issues in person.

3. *What is your perception of the relationship between staff and administration throughout the district? How would you characterize the leadership of the superintendent and other district and building administrators regarding engagement of staff, the DEA and the community at large?*

In general, the DCSD has a long history of a good working relationship with the DEA. That being said, there are also many instances in which trust between the administration and the DEA and/or community has been broken. For example, the special education citations from the state a couple of years ago, as well as the long practice of simply moving people around the district who may not be performing up to standard; failing to evaluate people appropriately, all damaged this relationship. I look forward to watching how the current structure of ILD positions, along with principals and teachers, works to improve the implementation of programs in our buildings with greater fidelity. With regard to community engagement, the District has been lagging significantly, but in the last year or so, we have made significant strides, particularly through our CRVP work, working with TAG Communications, and striving to shore up the communication tree (board → superintendent → ILDs/principals → teachers and staff). That being said, we could certainly improve on our ability to engage the community. For example, the roll-out of the new cabinet certainly hit some bumps, as did the roll-out of some of the Covid-related protocols and procedures we’ve seen over the last weeks and year.

4. *Do you think a teacher’s or employee’s pay or evaluations should be tied to student scores on standardized tests? What elements do you believe should be part of a teacher’s or employee’s performance evaluation?*

I am NOT in favor of student scores being used for teacher evaluations. The ability of a student to do well on standardized tests or other scores depends on so many factors, including food security, sleep habits, family background, cultural norms, and other unknowns, that it would be absolutely unfair. Teachers, no matter how good, have to work with the students they get, not the students they want. A teacher or employee, who has a list of expected tasks, should be evaluated on the ability to accomplish those tasks. Those performance goals and job expectations must be clearly set out at the beginning of the evaluation cycle, and they must be tailored to the particular classroom, or the teacher is potentially being set up for failure. A kindergarten teacher at Eisenhower will encounter a very different cohort of students than a kindergarten teacher at Monroe.

5. *Do you support or oppose maintaining a comprehensive master contract for all employee groups that includes all legal items that were previously included in the contract under the pre-2017 collective bargaining agreement?*

I absolutely want the school district and all unions to bargain for **ALL** permissible items for teachers and staff. I personally feel that the law passed was a terrible piece of legislation designed to basically eliminate unions. I will continue to urge the administration to bargain for any and all permissible subjects, not just the mandatory ones. All workers should have a say in their positions and be protected from retaliation and unsafe working conditions by clearly-outlined grievance processes and procedures. I, myself, am a member of a teachers' union (AFT/IFT Local 1836 at Black Hawk College), and I recognize the value of collective bargaining for maintaining a healthy and happy workforce. I come from a family that understands the value of unions and the collective voices of the many.

6. *How important is planning time for teachers in improving student learning? Do you think that teachers in the Davenport School District have enough, too little, or too much planning time at the elementary, middle and high school levels?*

As an educator myself, my first question is, can there ever be TOO MUCH planning time??? I don't think so! But seriously, generally speaking, there is never enough. Over the past year or two in particular, we have heaped more responsibility on our teachers and staff with regard to our students' social and emotional health, but we haven't given enough thought to the teachers' social and emotional health.

From a pedagogical standpoint, I am a fan of shorter class periods spread out over a year, but I recognize the amount of prep time that teachers may need. I know that many high school teachers do not love the model of teaching four blocks out of four. I'm sure that there is a compromise somewhere. In short, however, there is almost never enough planning time at any level, and the goal is to find an amount that is mutually agreeable, that is at a time that teachers can collaborate, so that multiple educators are crafting the education of each student, ensuring diversity and equity in instruction.

7. *Do you support or oppose a future ballot initiative to renew the SAVE (Secure an Advanced Vision for Education) fund 1¢ sales tax for infrastructure needs of the Davenport Community School District (DCSD)?*

I will always support renewing taxes that are already in place (barring some apocalyptic catastrophe). The infrastructure of DCSD is, like many districts, full of beautiful old buildings that need significant updates to be safe and up to code. The foundation of any community is strong public schools, and the community should contribute to that endeavor with taxes. I spend a bit more time considering new taxes, as I want to ensure that they are progressive and not regressive.

8. *Tell us the current status of your campaign and future plans and strategies including any groups or efforts you are affiliated with a vested interest in the outcome of the school board election.*

I have filed for an endorsement with the QC Federation of Labor, but I am not a member of any political or religious organizations that would be interested in the school board election (or any of those organizations altogether). One of the reasons I chose school board is that it is a nonpartisan position (or is supposed to be) and I expect everyone on the school board to have

only the students' best interests at heart. Currently, I have a small campaign fund filled by friends and family, and about 75 signs (almost all of which are on the east side of Davenport). I would like to put up a couple of larger signs, as I have permission to use the corner of 4th and Iowa in downtown Davenport, and also put up more signs on the west and north sides of the district, including Blue Grass, Walcott, and Buffalo. I am planning two mailers to voters in the district (but I am open to more if needed). I would appreciate any assistance in this matter.

9. *As we look to the future, do you support or oppose following CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommendations for students and staff health and safety for in-person learning environments?*

As a scientist, I have the ability to find and read the peer-reviewed medical and public health literature with regard to infectious diseases. I understand the nuances of viral transmission (and for things that I don't understand, I typically defer to my public health officials). I cannot honestly say that the CDC has done a great job of educating the public in recent weeks, but I can say that the CDC is the premier public health organization in the US and should be respected as such. I am not so arrogant as to think that I know more than they do. As a school board member, I must think in terms of the needs of the many, and I recognize that health and safety of our staff and students is paramount. I will follow the current scientific evidence and guidelines as shared by widely recognized public health authorities such as the CDC and Dr. Katz.

10. *Why do you think the Davenport Education Association should support you?*

i. I am an educator. I am in a classroom every day, and many of my students have just graduated from the very Davenport schools I am serving. Though I teach at Black Hawk College, I understand curriculum, teaching in stressful conditions (I had to pivot to online teaching too!), classroom management, and pedagogy. I know what it means to have students with disabilities in my classroom, as well as students who are parents, grandparents, and caretakers. I can work with all of them.

ii. As a parent of a child in the 7th grade in the Davenport schools (and I also have a toddler), I care deeply about the schools in which my own child is spending much of his time. I want to be sure that he gets the best education possible, while being in classrooms with people who do not look like him, talk like him, or have a home like his. All children deserve a safe environment that challenges them to meet their fullest potential, to think critically about the world around them, and to care about others in order to become productive members of our society.

iii. As a union member, I fully understand the importance of collective bargaining rights, and the negative impacts of the most recent Chapter 20 legislation in Iowa. Additionally, since I work for a public school in Illinois, I worked through the two-year budget impasse that occurred under Rauner. I am now very well-versed in how educational institutions have to make tough, sometimes unpopular, decisions to deal with economic hardship.

iv. I bring a unique scientific perspective to the Davenport community school board (I have a Ph.D. in vertebrate paleontology from the University of Chicago). Scientists draw conclusions based on the evidence provided to them, and those conclusions can change in light of new evidence. We are practiced at analyzing information with as little bias as possible (or at least with the awareness of our personal biases) and I am confident that my expertise has helped me

make good decisions for the students of the Davenport Community School District. One of the many areas of improvement for the District has been to practice data-based decision-making. I spent much of the first two years of my time on the board simply asking for data. I didn't give up, and now, with new leadership and as a result of the work of several of us on the board, we are able to approach the District's finances and student achievement in a more objective manner that "closes the loop" by using data to drive positive change in the schools.