



Questions for Candidates – D51 School Board, 2023

From moderator Michelle Boisvenue-Fox

Candidate Name and District: **CynDee Skalla - District A**

1. A variety of educators and studies indicate that an Arts education helps students with development of motor skills, language skills, social skills, decision-making, risk-taking, and inventiveness along with connecting them to cultures and the wider world. *What was your experience with the Arts as a student?* **As a student, I began playing the clarinet in the 4th grade. I was lucky enough to grow up in a time and a place with amazing music teachers who created band opportunities within the elementary school. I continued to play the clarinet throughout junior high and high school. I also participated in marching band. As a teenager, I also longed to learn how to play the piano. I had developed such a love of music, knew how to read music, and I wanted to transfer that knowledge to the piano. I was so excited when I received a piano as a Christmas gift when I was 16 years old. It was at 16 that I began to take piano lessons as well. I still have my first piano in the music room in my home, and I cherish it almost as much as I cherish the reed-pump organ I inherited from my great-great grandmother. I love music and was asked on multiple occasions to sing in school concerts as well as in church. When you're a member of a school band and/or choir, as I was, you are exposed to musical pieces from around the world which do indeed connect the musician to cultures other than our own. Aside from the musical side of the Arts, I took many art classes as a student. As a result of many artistic attempts, my actual artistic ability is one in which I can honestly say that I draw an absolutely amazing stick figure. I am grateful that my musical opportunities and knowledge, that I learned as a student, have enriched my life as an adult.**
2. There is a term in the arts community and education called Arts Integration. In acknowledging students' different learning styles, education with arts integration has students demonstrate understanding through an art form no matter the subject. Examples include creating plays for a history lesson, commercial jingles to teach persuasive writing, or narrating creative stories through photographs. *What role do you see for the Arts in the education of a D51 student?* **What an outstanding question! As an educator for around 35 years, I can speak to the value of integrated learning within teaching structures firsthand. As educators, we are always looking for innovative ways to integrate multiple content areas into our lessons. I love integrating stories, music, and even art into a simple math lesson. Integrating curriculum enhances student engagement, as I can attest firsthand. I have found one of the most popular ways to teach history is through what is called "Reader's Theater" which is a form of play acting. The students love practicing and performing and don't even realize that they are also learning. Teaching basic math concepts, such as skip counting, is so exciting and fun when taught using music and movement. When it comes**



to science instruction, there are multiple opportunities to have the students demonstrate their learning through drawing as well. Integrating curriculum is a way to engage more students and a way to enhance and extend learning opportunities to meet the varied learning styles of all students within the classroom. The role of the Arts is critical and vital to quality instruction.

3. As a community leader, I love this quote, "Because schools play a pivotal role in cultivating the next generation of citizens and leaders, it is imperative that we reflect on the fundamental purpose of a well-rounded education." It's easy to think of children as children but forget that they are an up-and-coming generation. *What do you see as the role of a D51 board member with regards to supporting curriculum beyond the core subjects of reading, writing, math, and the sciences to include an Arts Education? **As the mom of eight children and the teacher of thousands of Mesa 51 students, I know it is critical that the district offers a variety of classes that will capture students' interest and imagination. Offering a broad range of Fine, Applied and Technical Arts opportunities is critical to our success in serving students. I'd like to see more investments in these areas and know it is important that we engage both the right and left brains of students. We must provide both a focus on academics and learning basic skills and opportunities to educate the "whole child."***

4. The Art Heritage Program was created in the 1980s for K-5 students after an economic downturn in Western Colorado -- the Oil Shale Bust -- led to major budget cuts. Today, parents and community volunteers in 25 D51 elementary schools, as well as private schools in the Grand Valley, offer six art units based upon well-known artists. Students learn about an artist's life and times, view presentations of the artist's work, then create their own art. *In order to effectively manage arts education in the 46 schools within the district, would you support a full-time director position for the Arts Heritage Program? **I was so excited when I read this question that I wanted to answer it first! I am the luckiest among us to know just how valuable our Art Heritage Program is within our schools. I would love to lend my positive experiences as someone who wholly embraced this amazing art program within my classroom. I also have unending gratitude to all of the parent volunteers who have provided specific and concrete artist instruction to students throughout our district. I cannot praise this program enough. The volunteers who take the time to go and learn about new authors, their artistic styles, and bring that knowledge to our classrooms in a way that the students can attempt new artistry is priceless. The lessons are engaging, and the students look forward to the lessons each month. The materials really stretch the students in new ways of creating art. The volunteers also add so much to the classroom, and I loved the extra time and opportunities to build stronger relationships with the volunteers. I cannot tell you the pride the students have when they see their art displayed on the walls of the school as well. The Art Heritage program is absolutely stellar and an asset to the students in our district who are lucky enough to have dedicated volunteers who bring this amazing program to students in our schools.***

