

Response requested by Tuesday, September 8, 2026

Hello Emily:

When we launched Support RPS, one of the core commitments shared with the community was to amplify accurate information so people have the facts they need to stay informed. In that spirit, we are inviting all candidates for the Rockford Public Schools Board of Education on the November 2026 ballot to respond to the same two questions. All responses that are received will be shared on the Support RPS website and social media so community members can hear directly from candidates.

We respectfully request your response to the questions below by **Tuesday, September 8**. Please adhere to a **limit of 200 words** for each response. While we will not make edits or revisions to verbiage, any responses more than 200 words will be truncated to adhere to the word limit. The original responses will be available in case of any questions. Please reply directly to this email.

Candidate questions:

1. Do you plan to vote yes or no on the non-homestead operating millage proposal and Headlee override on the November ballot? Why?
2. If the millage proposal does not pass in November, what impact do you foresee this having on Rockford Public Schools?

Thank you for taking the time to respond and for your willingness to serve our community. We look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest regards,

Support RPS Leadership Committee

1. Do you plan to vote yes or no on the non-homestead operating millage proposal and Headlee override on the November ballot? Why?

A school board candidate should be evaluated on their judgment, willingness to listen, understanding of school finance, transparency, and ability to make informed decisions after hearing from the community and reviewing the facts available at the time.

I am happy to discuss the importance of the funding, the district's financial needs, the impact on taxpayers, and what I believe should happen if the proposal does not pass. What I am choosing not to do is publicly declare how I intend to cast my private ballot.

The secret ballot is an important protection in our democracy. While people are free to publicly share how they intend to vote, no voter should be pressured to disclose how they intend to cast their ballot.

I am willing to be transparent about my principles, reasoning, and how I would approach an issue as a board member; however, I am entitled to make my own decision as a private citizen when I enter the voting booth.

I want to be elected because voters trust my judgment, not because I gave the "right" yes-or-no answer to a predetermined question.

2. If the millage proposal does not pass in November, what impact do you foresee this having on Rockford Public Schools?

The millage proposal failing would create a serious revenue problem, but it would not mean the district has to immediately make \$9.5M in cuts on November 4.

The current Non-Homestead and Headlee Override millages will still levy on this winter taxes providing RPS with roughly \$4.76 million based on the taxable value indicated on the board approved L-4029. The RPS Audit Report 2024-2025 also indicates that the General Fund has an unassigned fund balance of \$18.8 million.

If the Operating Millage proposal does not pass, the above funds do not replace the lost revenue, however they provide the district with resources as it evaluates its options and engages the community.

These resources don't eliminate the problem, but they provide an opportunity to evaluate options rather than immediately deciding on reductions. By no means should any immediate, long-term decisions be made if the Operating Millage proposal does not pass.

If elected and the Operating Millage proposal does not pass, I would advocate for meaningful community engagement, as well as review of ballot languages and results of neighboring districts. I would ask district leadership and fellow board members to work together toward a May 2027 millage proposal.

Emily Whalen, CGFM

Candidate for Rockford Board of Education

Our Community. Our Schools. Our Future.