

What is the #1 issue that teachers are dealing with that is hindering academic success in the classroom? What will you do to make sure that the issue is addressed?

Decisions by lawmakers that hinder the ability for teachers to teach. There are unfunded mandates and policies based on politics that have no bearing on improving the academic achievement of our students. We want our teachers to focus on helping our students succeed academically. The Governing Board needs to continue to work with our elected state leaders, our bargaining employee groups, and our parents to ensure that we do what we can to focus on teaching and learning, not the attitudes of individuals who want to force their ideologies on our students.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP

What is the primary responsibility of a school board member and why do you want the position?

The primary responsibility of a school board member is governance, accountability, and advocacy. Board members must know the difference between good governance and wadding into the management. We have a committed and well-qualified superintendent who is responsible for implementing the State and Board policies in the district. We need to give our Superintendent, our principals, our teachers, and all our staff the kind of support to be successful in supporting our students and their families. Along the same lines, we do have a responsibility to hold our district accountable. This means that we want to make sure that our district is moving in the right direction in academics, finances and operations. We are responsible for asking the right questions while allowing the district leadership to improve and do better when it falls behind. We are responsible for being advocates for our district. We are ambassadors of our brand, and our brand is TUSD. We want to make sure that we support our district because we are in it all together. It also means we advocate to our other elected leaders, to our parents, to our community organization, our businesses and to anyone who is impacted by what we do in TUSD.

ACCESS

Where and how will you get your information about the diverse needs of the district's students, staff and community?

Part of my job as a school board member is to listen to our district's diverse communities and their needs. One way for me to get that information is to visit schools. I have been dedicated to visiting every campus during my first term to listen and to learn about what's going well, what's not, and what we can do to help fill the gaps. It is important for me to make sure that I communicate those to the Superintendent so his team can properly address those issues. I always advocate for our staff, community, and especially our students to come to our Calls to the Audience. I want our community to feel like they can also email me personally and provide me with their questions and concerns. My commitment is always to be engaged, to participate, and to advocate.

ACCOUNTABILITY

How should the District be held accountable? Have there been instances that you know of where it has not been transparent?

There are numerous accountability mechanisms that affect the district, whether it's something the Board decides through policy or an accountability measure that comes from outside entities like the AZ Department of Education. A way for the district to show accountability is to be transparent about the results of those accountability mechanisms like our district's financial audits by our external auditors, the reports from the internal auditor, the results of State-mandated testing, the use of effective oversight committees like the Bond oversight committee. I am not aware of any instances where the district has knowingly not been transparent.

What do you think the District's relationship with its internal auditors should be? Be specific.

The district's relationship with its internal auditor should be collegial, professional and one that helps the district improve its operations. The internal auditor should commit to helping the district identify risk, improve internal control, identify areas of efficiency, help the district with its financial accuracy, and finally help to provide the district with independent credibility. One of the outcomes should be for the district to see a return on investment in any recommended actions. The function of an internal auditor is to add value to the district's operations versus trying to be an individual who seeks "gotchas," which do not help anyone. Like our relationship with our external auditors, the relationship should not be adversarial and continue to be accountable to the Governing Board.

A recent KOLD news investigation has shown that an "audit finds TUSD failed to fix chronic absenteeism." What specifically is the district doing to address the ADE findings? What is the district doing to address the fact that there is chronic absenteeism in TUSD?

It should be noted that the report from KOLD contained several inaccuracies that make it seem that the district is not responding to chronic absenteeism. The findings from the ADE report were resolved with ADE. The follow-up audit by the district's Internal Auditor did highlight some weaknesses, but management has addressed these by implementing new systems or revising potentially outdated policies. One method to help with absenteeism is making sure that our families are partners in helping get their students to school. Parents are encouraged to sign up for the ParentVue application, so they can look at their student's attendance (both absences and tardies) to help their students be at school and in class. We have expanded our offering of Credit Recovery at our high schools. ESSER provided the district with a distinct opportunity to provide additional credit recovery courses at all high schools so that students who needed a non-traditional schedule could access coursework to keep them on track towards high school graduation. ESSER also provided to create the first ever online school – Tucson Unified Virtual Academy (TUVA) – to provide access to the same instruction provided at our brick-and-mortar schools to any student while attending from anywhere. Our Alternative Education Programs have been focused on doing outreach to students and families about alternative programs that allow students to continue their education in a way that fits their distinct life situations. We

have a districtwide initiative around Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Facilitators to help provide interventions to students with absence issues.

The district will continue to address any attendance/ADM findings as a result of the audit conducted, annually, by our external auditors as required by the Auditor General. This will help the district review any errors that need to be corrected and identify any patterns where additional training maybe required.

ACHIEVEMENT

How can TUSD increase achievement for all students? How would you close the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing students? What is the ideal learning environment for students? What are areas where you would like to expand curriculum or opportunities?

We need to steer clear of political ideologies that are distracting from the goal of teaching. We need to continue investing in our textbook adoptions. Over the last 2 years, this Board has approved the most textbook adoptions in recent memory, especially in areas like English Language Arts, Math, and Science in the middle and high schools. Our students need to learn from the most recent curriculum that aligns with the State Standards. One strategy that this Governing Board approved was the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Reading & Math Interventionists for our schools that are most at-risk. These interventions will focus on the most at-risk students who need to make the greatest academic progress. The district is also focusing on *progress vs. proficiency*. We want to recognize those students who are making forward momentum in their academics versus not reaching some artificial metric.

During my visits to schools, the “ideal” learning environment that I’ve seen is one that promotes project-based learning and collaboration. When students are engaged and focused on a project that incorporates the standards, it helps students to focus more and be more academically successful. We also want environments where students can debate and dialogue ideas. We need to help our students become critical and creative thinkers more than just learning from textbooks.

I want to continue to focus on expanding our Fine Arts, Physical Education, and counseling. These areas are critical in helping to augment the classroom experiences for students. This Governing Board helped implement the district’s first Social and Emotional Learning Department with ESSER funds and this department continues today. The post-pandemic world taught us that our students don’t just need physical first aid, but mental health first aid. I want to continue to find ways to provide the support our students (and their families) need to talk through their stress, anxiety, and anything else that affects them.

DESEG

What do you know about the decades long desegregation case against TUSD? Without court oversight, how should the district manage the desegregation money it still receives? Where should oversight of that process come from?

The desegregation case was the impetus this district needed to move in the right direction to focus not just on the academic and social needs of our African American and Latino students. It helped create amazing programs in our Mexican and African American Student Services Departments, and ensure that our Latino and African American students were receiving the resources and services they needed to be successful in TUSD. I am a product of the work that was done by the Deseg case. The Deseg case helped us look inward, as previous boards and administrations needed to address the vestiges of discrimination. However, I support the fact that we are no longer under court supervision and your elected Governing Board manages the oversight of the programs and funds to continue supporting Desegregation-related programming and services. The funding we receive should be focused on our students and not on attorneys and more administration. My colleague, Sadie Shaw, has proposed the creation of Deseg Oversight Committee. I think that this idea deserves a conversation to determine how we can engage our community, our staff, and our students in helping us craft the next generation of programming as Deseg moves into its 5th decade of existence in TUSD. As our CFO told the Board previously, we cannot continue to spend at the level we have with the limited funding that we are allowed under 910g. This will require that we start looking inwards, again, to rethink how we continue to address Deseg in a whole new light. The engagement of a committee or a group of committed individuals who will look to the **future** of Deseg in TUSD is what we need. We need to move away from having conversations about what happened because it only keeps us in the past. We need to focus on what we'll do together. The final oversight should be left to the elected Governing Board.

TEACHERS and personnel

Is the district adequately staffed? What is the best way to make sure the district, from custodians to teachers to substitutes, is well staffed?

We know that we have staffing needs across the district that need to be addressed. We have done better in recruiting and retaining our teaching staff through better compensation, benefits, and other professional development opportunities. This Board has done a great job by providing raises to our teachers and support staff over the last 4 years to help keep them here. We have ensured that all staff do not see an increase in the cost of their benefits. We have implemented our own Teacher Prep Academy that allows the district to grow its own cohort of teachers and commit to working with the district for at least 2 years.

With custodians and operational staffing, the Operations team has done a great job in addressing shortages in key areas like bus drivers, HVAC techs, and groundskeepers. I think we should have a conversation about how we engage the private sector to help supplement those gaps where our staff does not have the time to address certain needs, but we know they are still important to our schools. Our substitutes are an integral part of our staffing and help to fill those gaps in our classrooms. We have done a great job by most recently designating TEA as the representative for all subs in the district, allowing subs who are eligible to access ASRS pension benefits, eligible to access health insurance benefits, and earned paid sick leave. As such, I'm proud to have been endorsed in my re-election by all unions representing TUSD teachers and

staff, including TEA, AFSCME, and CWA. And while there is no one-size-fits-all solution for staffing, I can continue to work with our Unions on these efforts.

How should the district support the physical and mental health of the students?

We must allow students the ability to take in some sunshine, play with each other, and engage in teamwork is an added benefit of a good physical education program. We need to continue to provide those opportunities as much as possible for students to use this time to decompress, destress, and be ready to learn.

Our mental health initiatives during my tenure on the board have been excellent! We developed our first Social Emotional Learning and Development Department funded by ESSER funding. We knew that this department was such an incredible addition to our support services for our students that it continues to be funded, even after ESSER has ended. We've also partnered with the University of Arizona's Counseling Program for free counseling services to teachers, staff, students and their families. The program is called "Talk It Out." This is a unique partnership with our Family Resource Centers and allows counseling services in-person or through telehealth.

Some school districts are looking to ban cell phone use in classrooms. Do you know what the TUSD policy is regarding cell phone use? Do you believe it is effective? Be specific.

I agree that we should not have cell phones in the classroom during instructional time. I do not agree with the idea of banning cell phones from our schools. Our current policies allow our students to have cell phones with them, but they need to be out of view and cannot be used during instructional time. Teachers are allowed to let students use cell phones. I don't think that our policy is necessarily effective from the standpoint that every student follows every single rule, even though it does not have an impact on the instruction happening at school. I know teachers are finding creative ways to use instructional technology, which may include cell phones, to engage students in learning. If we can find ways to make cell phones a tool for learning for our students, set clear expectations for their use, and provide flexibility for their use when its appropriate, we can probably find that students can be reasonable. I think any time a school spends the time trying to ban things altogether, like cellphones, we will find ourselves having to control enforcing the rule versus taking advantage of the situation for the better.

Are there TUSD policies in particular that you would like to change or propose? Be specific.

I'd like to revisit the policy around school uniforms. I know we've had a lot of debate around our dress code in the last several months, but one thing that I dislike is the inherent inequities that come from school uniforms. I understand why a school uniform is necessary on some of our campuses, but we know that this puts our parents and families in a position where they have to find a way to purchase multiple sets of uniforms to wear to school. Sometimes these purchases are for multiple students, at the same time, which creates financial hardship for our families. I'd like

to at least engage our parents at schools with uniforms if these continue to be an aid in learning or a hindrance.