

Questions:

1. How best can the district compete with charter and private schools? What are parents looking for in those schools that they don't find in TUSD?

The only way for the district to compete with charter and private schools is to offer a comparable product, to put it in economic terms. This will be evidenced by two metrics: student and teacher retention rates. While most of the current board members are still wondering “why are teachers and students leaving?,” and demanding research to understand why, I contend that the formula is actually quite simple. No additional research is needed either. Teachers leave due to low morale and lack of classroom support. Most teachers just want to teach, but feel overwhelmed by the amount of time non-teaching tasks take from their instructional hours.

Likewise, students notice this effect on the quality of their education. They notice the disruptions due to student behaviors. They notice the constant revolving door of new teachers and substitutes, and they notice the size of their classes. The only way to improve these conditions is by redirecting administrative resources (human capital included) to teachers and support staff and services. The fact of the matter is that charter and private schools have a reputation for attracting high quality teachers while also offering smaller class sizes and better overall student outcomes.

As theoretically based as my answer is, I also know this to be true from my lived experience. Teachers don't want to teach at schools where they will be sacrificing their mental and physical health. Parents and students don't want to attend schools where they have to make a three way trade-off between proximity, opportunity, and wellbeing. Which leads me into my last point: parents and students both look for schools that have successful magnet programs. In addition to improving overall teaching and classroom conditions, TUSD has to ensure that they're staying competitive by offering programs that help prepare kids for *tomorrows* skills. These will be programs that help students bridge the gaps between the conceptual foundations and their real life applications.

2. What is the status of the desegregation case and how does the desegregation money paid by all TUSD property taxpayers help to desegregate the district?

As of 2022 the federal court found that TUSD had exhibited good faith compliance with the conditions of the Unitary Status Plan (USP), which meant that it had eliminated “the past vestiges of discrimination to the extent practicable,” in the court's legal opinion. This was after a long process that started as early as 2011. However, I'm not entirely convinced that TUSD actually deserved a compliant designation, as much as I'm convinced that new, unforeseen factors compounded and

complicated issues of desegregation. Or, basically that the plaintiffs could not prove that current inequalities in education were due solely to past vestiges of discrimination as opposed to entirely new causes. It was an extremely high standard of scrutiny to meet on the student plaintiffs' parts.

However, this whole experience should be a lesson to TUSD in what happens when the bare minimum is done: local control **can** and **will** be suspended. This is particularly important when it comes to continuing to make sure that *all* students receive a high quality education, and as it pertains to the high financial risk status of TUSD. In the federal desegregation case, magnet programs, transportation, and the budget were all factors that consistently raised concerns with the court of appeals. They directly resulted in compliance being denied, time and time again. These are all factors that currently still influence the educational achievement gap, and some of the elements for which the deseg money is to be used. The other elements being things like quality of education, an evidenced base accountability system, family and community engagement, student discipline, diversity of administrative and certified staff, student school assignments, and transportation. Not coincidentally, these are all the SAME concerns being brought to current board meetings.

Therefore, TUSD should never discount the possibility of a new desegregation case in which current causes are the primary focus, because it won't be able to rely on the argument of "you can't prove it was a vestige of the past," in that case. It's of the utmost importance that TUSD not only meet compliance, but exceed it, regardless if perfect implementation of the Unitary Status Plan was never required. Nearly perfect implementation is imperative if we want to maintain local and regional governance in the name of providing the best for our students.

3. Do you see a need for another round of school closures? Why or why not? What is the ideal procedure for school closures?

I think that the long term reality shouldn't be denied. The district has let their finances get so out of hand, that consolidations and/or closures due to low enrollment seem inevitable. To be clear, I do NOT see the necessity for closures as a remedy for the budget crisis. \$3 million dollars per school won't close the gap between revenues and costs. However, when Santa Rita only has a few hundred students for a campus made for nearly 2,000 students, there does seem to be a need for consolidations in terms of supply and demand (that's clear evidence of demand crisis).

However, I do advocate for consolidations over closures when possible. I've given the R/UHS campus as an example several times. These two schools are in the top five high schools in terms of enrollment. They also still attract non-TUSD students, but share a single campus. I don't think Santa Rita would be a good move for one of those schools, but Catalina could be. Santa Rita could also be satellite campus for another innovation tech type high school. There are a lot of options, in my opinion.

The ideal procedure would start at least a year in advance. It would also provide all students with a *viable* secondary option within TUSD.

4. What is the school board's ideal relationship to the Superintendent and to the school community (staff, parents, students, tax payers and community members).

School boards represent the most local level of democracy. They were a direct result of Horace Mann's advocacy that all children, regardless of socioeconomic background, deserved to be educated in literacy, numeracy, and civic virtue. In an attempt to institutionalize education, some states established school districts. These states also delegated responsibility for funding and administration of the school district to school governing boards, which were to be locally elected. This was to be consistent with the revolutionary principle of "no taxation without representation." Especially since these school boards were authorized to levy property taxes specifically for public education.

This is important to remember when considering the ideal relationship between the board and the superintendent. That is, the whole concept of a school board was created in order to represent and serve the educational interests of the community. School boards were not created in order to answer to a superintendent.

Additionally, if we're looking at Arizona revised statute, 15-341 specifically mentions that the only administrator that the school board evaluates is the superintendent. Again, this establishes a natural hierarchy. The school board exists to serve the community, and the superintendent answers to the board (via evaluations).

From my leadership roles with my education association, I also know that positive working relationships are a must. However, this is not to be confused with blind allegiance or loyalty in either direction. The board's responsibility is to check administration and hold them accountable, and ideally they'd do so with independence and integrity, as opposed to forceful bullying.

5. What would you do about high rates of absenteeism in our schools? What sources have you found to consult on this issue?

The way to keep students at school is to help them meet the needs that are preventing them from getting to school in the first place. For many families, this starts with the basic transportation to get to and from school itself. However, having a robust mentorship and intervention program will also help to not only identify potential issues before they become a problem, but also to help students feel a sense of ownership and belonging. Interventions also have the added benefit of helping students catch up, before they feel like they're too far behind. Just as adults ignore problems until a later date, it's similar with students. Students who miss a large proportion of school end up feeling so overwhelmed, as if they can never catch up in their academic coursework. So they ignore

it, and never look back. Interventions can help identify these students before they feel like it's no longer achievable.

For high school students, especially those who work, helping with basic needs and hygiene products, as well as providing a flexible schedule for kiddos also goes a long way. Most of my background knowledge on this topic comes directly from the NEAToday Newsletter.

6. What is your view of the Director of Finance responsibility for providing a comprehensive budget book in a timely fashion? Should board members have the completed budget before voting on it?

What are we paying a Director of Finance for if not to prepare the comprehensive budget book? It's as the saying goes, "He had ONE job," and he couldn't even do that. If he did do his job, the 26/27 budget book would have started being prepared this time last year. So as far as I'm concerned he hasn't been meeting his basic responsibilities.

Merely providing it isn't enough. Advanced preparation, and an effort to present it in an understandable way is needed as well. As a math teacher, I'm appalled that he is going up there and so comfortably leaving everyone confused about it. He's also quoted by the media as saying "I'm glad that there's consensus that board members need to be more proactive," and it reeks of arrogance. He ALSO has a responsibility to be fully transparent and proactive, just as the board members do. If there's one thing I know about numbers, it's that you don't need to make it so confusing if there's nothing to hide. So the suspicions surrounding the entire situation are more than warranted. I'm surprised it's gone this long with absolutely zero consequence.

The board should absolutely see the completed budget book before voting on it. They should not only see it, but have studied, dissected, and comprehended it before voting.