

Questions for website:

ACHIEVEMENT GAP:

TUSD shows low achievement levels in many important areas. Where do you believe this comes from? How would you, as a board member, try to both improve overall achievement and reduce the imbalance between the highest and the lowest achievers? As a part of this issue, do you believe that all seniors who graduate are academically ready when they graduate? Please explain.

A: I would hesitate to ascribe too much importance to traditional measurements of achievement levels at this point in time. We are just now emerging (hopefully) from a global health crisis of historic proportions. I've talked to teachers who seem surprised that test scores aren't lower. I know many people are tired of hearing about COVID-19. But we haven't seen the last of its impacts. Transmission is down, but the variants continue to spread. Deaths are down but people are still dying. Many of our teachers, students, and staff lost loved ones during this pandemic. Many kids lost out on years of social interaction at crucial moments in their development. It's possible that we need to view achievement differently at this moment in history.

As we rebuild and renormalize our classrooms, we need to reduce the imbalance between the highest and lowest achieving students. Each student needs different techniques and approaches to thrive. This is going to take some quality teaching. I know that public school teachers are up to the task: they are a passionate bunch. But we need to keep them, and we need more of them. As a district, hiring and retaining qualified teachers needs to be a priority. Counselors, social workers, emotional learning teachers, and the arts are an essential part of the equation as well. Extracurriculars should not be treated as "extra." Kids need to feel involved, supported, safe, and loved at school. This is why we need to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual children. It is why we must remain committed to continuing to address racial disparities that still exist, even after the District has been released from judicial supervision. It is why we need to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. And it is why we need free school lunches. Because in order for our students to thrive, they need to know that they are supported.

I'm certain that we could increase our graduating seniors' academic readiness upon graduation. It is important to remember that "readiness for graduation" may look different for every student. There are lots of ways a student can be successful. Some will go to college. Others may find jobs, or enter trade schools. For some students success looks entirely different. We need to recognize this as a district.

DESEGREGATION:

What comments do you have in response to the 7/20/22 Court order which finds that TUSD has substantially removed all vestiges of segregation/discrimination?

Also, please tell us your ideas to institute community oversight over the Post Unitary Status Reporting and Accountability Plan (PUSRAP). Finally, what role should the Board serve in oversight of the Plan, including the use of desegregation funds?

A: Attention to integration and inclusivity is *more* important now that judicial oversight has been lifted. TUSD needs to serve all of Tucson, and it needs to ensure all students thrive. Without the specter of litigation TUSD needs to show the community that it is truly committed to the goal of justice and equality in the treatment of teachers, staff, and students.

This responsibility should primarily fall to the Board. Ultimately, policy is made by the Board and the Superintendent works for the Board. It is the Board's responsibility to ensure TUSD is working for all students. The Superintendent should *not* make major changes to policies and programs without Board notification and approval. Programs such as the District Alternative Education Program (DAEP) – which was created in order to address inequality in the District –

should not be substantively changed without Board input and approval. Use of desegregation funds should be approved by the Board: the Board meets twice monthly, and can be called into special session if needed to address an immediate need.

It seems obvious that there should be community oversight of the Post Unitary Status Reporting and Accountability Plan. There should be a committee that includes representatives of teachers and parents who work together to determine what areas still need improvement, and whether existing policies are working. There should be a requirement that such a committee include parents and teachers from diverse backgrounds. This committee should make regular reports to the Board.

SUBS:

What do you know about TUSD's history with subs, and do you believe they are treated fairly?

If you are elected, what do [you] think you as a board member could or should do to improve TUSD's relationship with subs?

A: Having spoken with some substitute teachers in TUSD, I'm aware that the district is relying heavily on long-term substitutes to fill gaps left by our hiring and retention problems. This is not fair to permanent teachers, not fair to students, and not fair to the substitute teachers. Substitutes are often not properly trained for the classes that they are asked to teach long term, not fully trained on the technology they have to use, and not provided with adequate resources to do the job properly. Who does this benefit? One barrier to substitute teachers being treated fairly is their inability – which to my understanding is currently codified in TUSD bylaws – to form a bargaining unit. Permitting the substitutes to unionize would give them a voice, and help them negotiate for fair treatment, and proper training. Fixing our hiring and retention would help reduce our overreliance on substitutes to do jobs they are untrained for.

SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP:

If you become a school board member, what will your relationship with the Superintendent be? With the staff, teachers and community?

A: My parents met and fell in love in Library Science school. My wife has a Masters of Library and Information Science. Surrounded as I am with trained librarians, I know that one should never rely on a single source for information.

I want to hear from staff, teachers, and parents often. I want to hear from the unions representing staff and teachers (and hopefully soon substitute teachers!) often. Of course I will hear from the Superintendent as well. But the Board should not rely on the Superintendent's information alone when making important decisions. A variety of sources is important to ensure our decisions are fully informed.

DISTRICT ISSUES:

It is easy to be a cheerleader for TUSD, harder to shine a light on the problems. How are you personally committed to focusing on the areas that need addressing and making TUSD a better district? How will you handle and balance both of these roles?

A: I'm not sure I agree that being a cheerleader is fundamentally a separate role from focusing on problem areas and finding ways to improve. As a father I am my children's number one fan, but I'm also there to help them overcome difficulties and find ways for them to grow into the amazing people they will become.

I think that anyone who lives in Tucson should be committed to making TUSD a better district. I'm a father with a child enrolled in TUSD, so I have a personal stake in making sure that our schools are as strong as we can make them. But even if I had no children, I would still benefit from strong public schools. Critical thinking skills are essential to the continued survival of our democracy. The prevalence of election-deniers and conspiracy theorists on the national, state, and local stage show us that knowledge of history and civics are more important today than they have been at almost any time in recent memory. Scientific literacy is uniquely important as we deal with pandemics, global warming, and other major issues of our day.

Better education, stronger schools, and a restorative discipline approach is essential to a functioning society as well. Kids who are engaged, who are supported, and who are safe tend to excel. Children who feel unsafe, who aren't supported, and who aren't engaged end up struggling. When those same children are suspended, expelled, or sent to juvenile detention they learn that society views them as criminals. They interact with other children who have also been suspended, expelled, or sent to juvenile detention. They don't learn to socialize outside of this group. They meet society's expectations, and then they become my clients at the public defender's office.

So of course I am dedicated to shining a light on TUSD's problems and making our public schools the best they can be. Because we're all in this together.

HR AUDIT:

As a member of the Governing Board, you will be responsible for hiring and /or approving the hiring of district administration? How will you overcome some of the deficiencies exposed by the HR audit in order to hire qualified staff and reduce the turnover rate?

A: In reviewing the most recent HR audit of TUSD it seems clear that one major issue is that of staffing. The Final Human Resources Report, which reviewed the hiring process, indicated that with the amount of overtime being paid to TUSD Human Resources, three additional staff could be nearly fully funded. The audit found at least one incidence of an HR staffer working a shift that lasted longer than 16 hours. While this individual's commitment to TUSD is commendable, it's this sort of exhaustion-level work that leads to burnout, and to mistakes. Problems with a Human Resources Department can exacerbate hiring and retention problems. Having an HR team that is fully rested, and able to focus on their job will serve the district better.

ACCESSIBILITY:

How do you propose to increase/ensure board accessibility and accountability to all stakeholders including parents, students and employees? Would you consider Call to the Audience (which is where members of the community can address the board at meetings) to be one of the valuable methods?

A: Call to the Audience has some unique restrictions on it. Board members are limited in the comments that they can make, and in their ability to interact with audience members. I suspect there is a way to modify the process to allow a better exchange of ideas without completely bogging down the entire meeting in a tangential issue or devolving into a public shouting match. Until that solution is found, however, Call to the Audience is a very limited form of communication, not much different from voicemail or email. I can assure voters that if you see me taking notes, I am paying attention. I hear you.

I believe that there should be time set aside for the Board to hear from the teachers, the staff, the bus drivers, and the substitute teachers. I believe that, regarding major policy decisions, the Board should have a chance to hear from - and ask questions of - a representative of those who would be impacted by the decision. The unions - TEA, AFSCME, and any additional relevant collective bargaining organizations - should have a voice at Board meetings.

DISCIPLINE/TARDINESS:

There are no consequences for students who are repeatedly tardy. Do you believe that there should or should not be? Are you aware of the effects that tardiness has, and will have on other behaviors?

A: Tardiness can clearly disrupt a classroom, divert the teacher's control of the lesson, distract other students from learning, and impact the tardy student's ability to learn. This is an important issue. The question that needs to be answered – on a case-by-case basis – is *why* is this student tardy? As an attorney with over fourteen years experience representing clients at or near the poverty line I know that behavior like this can be caused by a multitude of factors. Many of these are emotional, familial, societal, economic, mental, physical, or systemic. It is easy to write off a child – especially a teen – as having a "bad attitude," but that attitude comes from somewhere.

It's hard to imagine how punishment could solve any of these issues. If a child lacks adequate transportation to school, adequate parental support, or is struggling with an undiagnosed mental health issue, punishing them isn't going to remove the barrier that prevents them from getting to class on time. On the other hand, It is easy to imagine how punishment could *exacerbate* these issues.

This is where restorative discipline is uniquely suited to resolving the issue. A case-by-case approach that involves all those impacted by the child's behavior – including the child themselves – to get to the bottom of *why* the student is late is going to have a greater chance of modifying behavior and solving problems than punishment ever will.