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Director-at-Large Position 3

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### Everett PTSA Council Written Candidate Forum – General Election: November 2, 2021

#### Background

In October of 2021, the Everett PTSA Council invited all four school board candidates to participate in a written candidate forum. All candidates were asked to respond to the written questions. Three of the four candidates submitted responses.

#### Disclaimer

Everett PTSA Council is a non-partisan organization that does not endorse candidates. Candidate responses are exactly as submitted. Everett PTSA Council does not make corrections of any kind or verify statements of truth or fact.

#### Other Resources

To learn more about some of the topics covered, see the following websites:

OSPI School District Report Card: <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/100083>

OSPI Learning Standards: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/learning-standards-instructional-materials>

Public Disclosure Guidelines for Schools/Campaigning: <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/learn/guidelines-school-districts>

#### Question #1

What are the biggest challenges facing Everett School District right now?

**Response:** “The number one priority for public schools should be the academic achievements of the students. In Everett, nearly 30% of our students do not meet minimum standards in English and nearly half our students do not meet minimum standards for math and science. However, 95% of our students are awarded a diploma. These were the statistics for the 2018-2019 school year. Achievement tests have not been administered since that year, so we don’t have data on how remote schooling for nearly a full school year affected student learning. It can easily be assumed that it did not improve these numbers. Improving student achievement while dealing with COVID issues is not only the biggest challenge EPS faces, it must be its number one priority.”



**Question #2**

How can schools best address both the academic and mental health needs arising from the pandemic?

**Response:** “The isolation students experienced during remote learning was a terrible blow to mental health, but one of the odd blessings of the lockdown was the students’ discovery that they need each other. I would love to see programs that bring students together that help them motivate each other on to better scores, peer tutoring, and positive peer pressure to be diligent about their studies.

COVID relief funds should also be used to cover mental health visits for both students and employees.

More than anything, extra support in core subjects (math, science, English, and history) at all grade levels is essential. Before- and after-school tutoring programs staffed by qualified teachers, as well as transportation to and from such tutoring opportunities, must be provided to help students recover the learning loss from this past year. This tutoring must be free to income-qualified students.”

**Question #3**

We are seeing more conversations about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in our community. How will you encourage educators in the Everett School District to adapt their teaching practices to be more inclusive of special education students? How will you measure progress and promote accountability for all aspects of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)?

**Response:** “Access programs for special education students that include sensory supports, resource rooms, ABA trained para’s, etc., need to be implemented immediately. It’s shocking to me that such programs are not well established already in a district with 20,000 students. As a board member, I would begin inquiries into getting those support services into our schools right away.”

**Question #4**

What are the issues that need to be addressed to provide racial equity in the schools?

**Response:** “According to OSPI, 89% of Everett’s teachers are white in a district where half the students are not. My opponent says that this is due to the candidate pool available to them and that they’ve begun a program in our district to encourage our own students to enter the field of education. Additionally, Everett boasts having the highest paid teachers in the state. What this looks like is that Everett has reserved the highest pay for white teachers. Personally, I find it very hard to believe that Everett cannot find non-white teachers to work in the highest-paid district. I think a more intentional effort to find such teachers is needed.

I do, however, think that a program to encourage our own students to get a degree in education and come back to their own community to teach is an excellent idea.

If you’ve seen my statement in the voters guide, you will see that I am against teaching students to view themselves and others through the lens of critical race theory. That does not mean, however, that I am against hiring practices that help our teaching and support staff to better reflect our student population. As an immigrant, and the daughter of an immigrant, from the Philippines, I believe it’s important for students to see examples of success within our public schools that come from their own racial communities. I believe it gives students hope, a sense of pride, and something to aspire to.”

**Question #5**

How would you convince voters of the need to pass bonds and levies for the district?

**Response:** “This is a loaded question that assumes I would vote to submit the bond/levy to the voters in the first place. In any case, it is inappropriate for me to "convince" voters to approve a bond or levy. That falls in the category of campaigning, which is an activity school districts -- and school directors, by extension -- are forbidden from engaging in. My role as a school board member is merely to decide whether to put a tax measure to voters and when to do it. Your confusion is understandable, however, since my opponent has been getting away with simultaneously being the Citizens Bond and Levy Committee Communications Chair as well as a sitting school director from the time she was first appointed. This is a flagrant violation and should not be tolerated.

That being said, there are serious issues regarding EPS’s budget. Since the McCleary decision, which requires that the state funds schools and the districts not to depend on levies, the state has nearly doubled the amount of money provided to the districts, but the districts (including Everett) keep exceeding their budgets, leading to the need for more levies. The district’s biggest expenditure, by more than 80%, is employee compensation. I know that teacher contracts are a sensitive subject and the fact that Everett has the highest paid teachers in the state is not a bad thing. Teachers should be paid well for their hard work. However, taxpayers pay the teachers’ salaries and there should be a return on their investment. As stated in my answer to a previous question, more than 40% of our students do not meet the minimum standards in math and science and nearly 30% do not meet the minimum standards in English. While this is better than some of our neighboring districts, it is still a disservice to the students and families who depend on our public schools to help students prepare for college, trade school, or entrepreneurship once they receive their diploma. Additionally, in a year when many families lost their jobs or businesses, or families had to make financial sacrifices to care for their children who were suddenly not in on-campus classes, the Board’s approval of the new teachers contract on a consent agenda (closed session) which gave teachers a salary increase (again, in a district with already the highest paid teachers in the state) is an insult and does not motivate the public to provide more funds through levies and bonds.

There are easy ways to trim the budget that will not sacrifice student programs. Here are a few suggestions:

- Even though his percentage of the total is small, the superintendent needs to accept responsibility for the problem. So, the superintendent's Total Salary should be reduced from \$304K to \$200K. That would still put him at a higher Total Salary than Governor Inslee.
- Beginning teachers, in their 0-5th year, should not have their Total Salaries reduced. Teachers with 6 years of experience or more should have their Total Salaries reduced to the 2018-2019 levels where the union contract gave teachers an 18% raise that could/should have been spread out over several years to match inflation.
- The need for four deputy/assistant superintendents is questionable. We could reduce that number to two and the Superintendent can choose which assistants to keep.
- The need to keep the teachers union president on the payroll at over \$100,000/year is also questionable as it seems his sole job is to get Everett School District residents to pay more money.
- We should also stop paying consultants at the rate of hundreds of dollars an hour whose task seems simply to validate what the Board wants to do instead of the Board coming up with less expensive alternatives themselves.
- Also, SCAP (SCHOOL Construction Assistance Program) funds are designated for school buildings/classrooms, but Everett used such funds for their administration building instead. As I mentioned in my interview with the Herald, the Board and administrators demonstrated this last year that they have the ability to work remotely. The administration building could be converted to an elementary, middle, or high school. The Board members and district office employees could work remotely. This would correct a wrong and provide much needed classroom space for students.
- Lastly, just putting a bond or levy out for voters to decide upon can cost the district upwards of \$100,000. The district needs to be much better stewards of the money that hard-working taxpayers have already provided before they spend taxpayer money to ask them to provide more taxpayer money.”



**Question #6**

What will your strategies be to work productively with your board colleagues and members of the public whose ideas are different from yours?

**Response:** “I would appeal to outcomes. What leads to better student achievement? What leads to the ability to operate within our budget without cutting student programs? There’s been a significant drop in enrollment and rise in declarations of intent to homeschool. The drop in enrollment means less funds to the district. What would it take to convince those families to re-enroll their children in the district? Board membership is unpaid. I believe that anyone who runs for election to the Board does so because we believe in making things better for the students who are our future. Actions that lead to measurable improvements in student achievement, college preparedness, and job readiness is something where we could find common ground.”

**Question #7**

What are Everett School District’s greatest strengths?

**Response:** “I worked for several years at Kirkland’s Lake Washington Institute of Technology in their High School Programs office where students who had dropped out, or were on the verge of dropping out, came to enter an alternative pathway to graduation. That pathway included technical training in the programs that LWTech offers. These students graduated with marketable skills and a hope for their future. My years at LWTech have made me an advocate for education that includes job training. In Everett, we are in the middle of an industrial region with huge potential for training that gives students tangible skills that often provide a better starting wage than jobs that require a 4-year degree. We also have Everett Community College in our own backyard as well as the Sno-Isle Tech Center. All of this makes it possible to go after much more intentional and robust partnerships with industries in our area, training students that will provide local workers to these companies.”