

FROM THE CANDIDATES: CLEAR LAKE SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE Q&A

The sole competitive race for Clear Lake's school board elections tasks voters with selecting two at-large directors from a pool of three candidates. Ahead of Election Day, which is Tuesday, Nov. 2, see their answers to our questions below.

Chyrl Bergvig



Occupation: After receiving my masters, I was employed by the Graettinger School District as school counselor k-12, P.E. teacher and coaching duties. After seven years I moved to Hawarden, Ia. working at West Sioux schools as H.S. Counselor and coach where I stayed for 8 years before coming to Clear Lake to serve as H.S Counselor and coach. I spent 17 years in the district as counselor and assistant principal after completing my administration certification from ISU. I retired from the Clear Lake district in 2009.

Education: I graduated from Fort Dodge High, then attended Iowa Central Com. College receiving an AA degree. I continued my education attending Parsons College majoring in physical education. I later returned to Fort Dodge to attend ISU for a master's degree in school counseling.

Other: Currently I am on the Clear Lake School Board serving my second term.

Tony Brownlee



Occupation: President, Kingland Systems

Education: Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Central College in Pella, Iowa; MBA from Iowa State University

Other: My wife Amy and I live in Clear Lake and have two children: Reese, a freshman at Clear Lake High School, and Isaac, a 7th grader at Clear Lake Middle School. In addition to my work at Kingland and service on the school board since 2017, I serve as a volunteer coach for the Clear Lake track and field teams, serve as the president of the Clear Lake Wellness Center Board, am a member of Zion Lutheran Church, and serve on advisory boards for Iowa State University.

Greg Southgate



Occupation: Since 2009 I have been employed by Christensen Farms in various roles all involved with pork production. I currently hold the position of Marketing Manager for the North/Central Iowa region.

Education: I was raised and educated in England and graduated from the Royal Agricultural University with a BSc (Hons) in International Agriculture, Land & Business Management.

Other: My family and I moved here in 2009 and are proud to call this community our home. Additionally I have served on the Clear Lake Fire Department since 2009 am privileged hold the rank of Lieutenant/EMT-B and love the camaraderie this service brings.

HOW SHOULD THE DISTRICT PROCEED TO GET STUDENTS BACK ON TRACK AMID LEARNING LOSS INFLUENCED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

To help students recover from any learning loss, the district needs to use ESSER Funds to hire additional certified teachers. These teachers would be called interventionist. The ESSER funds were given by the government for school districts to help with additional support for students. In the high school they have Prime Time so students may go to any teacher for help and the teachers can also request a meeting with a student during Prime Time. Also, there is 30 minutes after school where teachers remain in their classrooms specifically to help students.

First, I am proud of all of the hard work of our teachers and administrators during the last 18 months. It has been tough and they have stay committed to our students and served them in so many ways. As we look at this year and the years ahead, it is critical that our school understands the needs of each student, and tailors instruction to help each student learn. At Clear Lake, we have been using new techniques to evaluate student learning and are evaluating if the teaching techniques we are using are working. Our teachers work together in teams every week to evaluate progress and come up with improvements for the next week, focused on the student. Our teachers are winning the battle of learning loss each week by focusing on the data, working together in teams, and most importantly working with our students to learn.

The district needs to listen to the teachers. Teachers know where opportunities for improvement lay, they know which kids are struggling and they know what it will take to minimize any learning loss due to COVID. The board and Superintendent need to do a better job supporting and listening to their teachers, para educators and any individual involved with 'boots on the ground' education. If the district does not start communicating and actually listening to our educators we run the risk of failing our students. Failure here is unacceptable. Regardless of the outcome of this election our board and Superintendent need to do a better job of listening to our educators' needs.

HOW WOULD YOU SUGGEST THE DISTRICT SPEND ITS PANDEMIC RELIEF MONEY?

The pandemic relief monies were used to obtain additional cleaning supplies, Plexiglas for office protection, and masks for the district. Computers, and laptops, were purchased to give students who did not have access so they could work on-line with their class plus wiring the home, if necessary. Moveable computer stands for each classroom helped staff present lessons as well as move around the class as needed. The expense for professional cleaning of every area of the school each evening was a pandemic expense. The gas expenses for delivering lunches to households was paid through pandemic funds. This is only a partial list. To receive the funds a detailed list had to be submitted by the school district.

As a board, we have been actively involved discussing and allocating funding each month as pandemic relief funds have been provided. The key areas that I have supported have included additional teaching sessions for kids who need extra help, additional teachers and classroom coaches to help improve our student coverage. I have also supported new materials and curriculum to help advance learning as well as new technologies and tools to help our teachers manage their classrooms and provide a more dynamic learning environment.

We need to prioritize instruction and education. If we need to hire more teachers then hire more teachers. The worst thing we as a district can do right now is stretch our teachers too thin. We need them focusing on teaching the subjects they excel at teaching, specifically within one grade level where they and ultimately their students can thrive. If we need more para educators then hire more. Increase the wages of para educators so they go into work every day viewing it as a career, one that they can be proud of and really make a difference to a child's learning. The biggest mistake would be to spend money on peripheral projects, such as the Wellness Center, while our learning and educational resources go begging.

SHOULD THE SCHOOL DISTRICT MANDATE MASKS IN SCHOOLS TO MITIGATE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19? WHY OR WHY NOT?

The question to mandate masks for the district is a hot topic. I feel this year masks should be a personal or family choice. The district needs to take serious action if someone is bullied or teased for their choice. My reasons for no masks are students do not see the entire face-no smiles or expressions of school personnel is very necessary for students and employees. It is very hard to hear and understand conversations with a mask being worn and playing with the masks can be a problem. These are a few reasons I do not support a mask mandate.

Our Clear Lake team has worked well with other districts, health authorities, and followed the guidance of our state authorities when determining our mask policies. Depending on the situation and guidance, our district has required masks. In other situations, the district has used other practices to promote a healthy learning environment. I will always listen to concerns that parents or community members may have, and will continue to work closely with our teachers, administration, and the board to evaluate changes to Clear Lake's health and safety policies.

This is a tricky question. Do we all want to see COVID eradicated - absolutely. However, I do not believe it should be any school's job to mandate for or against masks in school. The biggest issue to my mind is how politicized this topic has become. It is my belief that whether masks are worn or not is a matter of personal responsibility and should be enforced by individuals and/or their parents. Take politics out and let common sense rule. If anyone wishes to wear a mask or not that is their decision and they shouldn't be penalized for that decision.

OPEN ENROLLMENT NUMBERS HAVE BEEN ON THE RISE OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, WITH 245 STUDENTS JOINING THE DISTRICT LAST YEAR. IF THE TREND CONTINUES, HOW SHOULD THE DISTRICT RESPOND?

Open enrollment has been on the upswing for the Clear Lake district. As a Board we need to be aware of class sizes. The Board has established maximum numbers for K-6 class sizes. A space concern to add classrooms is especially a problem for the middle school. Each year we need to meet and review the districts 3-5-year plan involving community members. So far, the Board has not declined any open enrollment and we hope never to do so.

The rise in open enrollment shows that our Clear Lake schools have the programs, teachers, and high quality education that families want and students need. As a district, we review our open enrollment trends regularly to plan for the number of teachers and facility space we need to provide an exceptional experience for our students. I feel confident in our current plans. While we look at open enrollment as favorable, it also points out a challenge for our community: housing. As a Clear Lake community, I believe we must continue to look for ways to promote housing that families want and need when deciding where they would like to live and raise their family. I am committed to support our school while also working outside the school with other community leaders to promote investment in Clear Lake businesses and housing that can support those families.

Hopefully the existing school board and Superintendent have been planning for this and are prepared for increased numbers of students. Again I would reiterate the need to improve communication and listen to our teachers and Principals. They will know where the needs are within our schools, what extra resources are required and how to approach getting all the bases covered. Let's trust the years of experience that works within our school buildings. We have great teachers here at Clear Lake - let's listen to every single one of them, from the first year rookies through to the veterans with twenty years of education under their belts. All will have good ideas and opinions - the district just needs to stop ignoring them and start embracing their talents. Put educators first, watch morale amongst staff improve and the district and its quality of education will benefit greatly.

Some biographical information from candidates has been lightly edited for length.