

Election 2018 Q&A

LCSD1 Board of Trustees (4 open seats)

Bertel Budd, Daniel Marces and Noah McAtee did not provide answers to our questions.



BRITTANY ASHBY, INCUMBENT



PAULETTE GADLIN



MARGUERITE HERMAN, INCUMBENT



CHRISTY KLAASSEN

Q: Why are you running for the LCSD1 Board of Trustees?

I do not believe we have thriving and vibrant communities without strong public schools. I want to live in a vibrant community; thus, I think it is important to be involved and help make the schools the best that they can be. I have strong community connections, education and governance knowledge, and the ability to find agreement amongst many parties that will be crucial for our schools moving forward.

I want to make a difference. I recall watching my children graduate and feeling a great sense of pride for my children and for the education they received. I believe that no matter how good something is, it can always be better. As a former student, parent and employee of LCSD1, I want to be a part of establishing policies that strive for educational excellence.

I am running for re-election to continue working on providing a complete, excellent education to students in schools that are secure, where students are safe, healthy and active. I will continue asking the hard questions and making decisions based on facts, in the light of strategic plans and policies, statutes and Constitution, while keeping quality education and well-being of students as the goal.

As a parent of school-aged children, I have a vested interest in seeing our schools maximize every student's potential. I have worked in nearly 20 schools around the district, and I understand the opportunities and challenges we face. My professional experience working for a bipartisan government commission in Washington, D.C., has given me an understanding of board dynamics. I hope to apply these skills and experiences to build upon the success of our district.

Q: What will be your top priorities as a school board member?

Improved communication at all levels is my top priority. Like many other organizations, the district sometimes struggles to communicate with stakeholders, both internally and externally. This would be my top priority moving forward. Building stronger bridges to create stronger supports and opportunities for our teachers and kids is my second priority. I believe we can build stronger bridges with our community, with our legislators and with other stakeholders that will improve opportunities for success.

I will promote policies that: 1) ensure students are prepared for college, vocational education or the military; 2) ensure the board listens to input and encourages collaboration between students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders; 3) ensure students and teachers work in a safe environment; 4) ensure the district is fiscally responsible, and balances needs and wants to guarantee a quality education; 5) ensure that the graduation rate continues to improve, particularly with high-risk students.

My top priorities continue to be: excellent leaders at the top and in every building; nurturing leadership among teachers, maintaining compensation so we can attract and retain excellent faculty and staff; and adjusting to reduced funding while preserving academic, activities and athletic programs as much as possible. My priorities include working with fellow trustees to write evidence-based policies and strategic plans that focus on students, and then carrying through without fear or favor.

My top priorities include: 1) improving student outcomes by maintaining focus on academic growth and proficiency, expanding career pathway opportunities and ensuring students have individualized instruction/support needed to succeed; 2) carefully managing district resources by promoting fiscally conservative budget oversight; 3) prioritizing school safety and security by continually evaluating best practices for securing our facilities, and supporting positive school climate initiatives; and 4) providing responsive leadership by listening to the community's concerns and input.

Q: How should the district handle the current overcrowding in the schools?

We need to continue to evaluate and advocate for options to solve this issue. There are not easy fixes, but we can continue to look at options of adding space when we can, strategically using the space that we have and planning for the future needs of our district.

As a former teacher, I know it's difficult to teach in an overcrowded classroom. I agree with the decision to cap the number of students in kindergarten through third grade. In the future, LCSD1 should assure all rules for classroom size are followed and encourage input from all stakeholders.

With ongoing rejection of LCSD1 facility needs (capacity, suitability) by the state, we must continue to use modulars, although that has serious limits, while enrollment grows. We must continue to press the Legislature for construction/renovation and consider taking on debt to take care of our students.

The ideal solution would be to build schools. Unfortunately, limited state funding may require evaluating other options, such as redrawing boundaries, busing students, utilizing modular buildings or simply putting up with larger classroom sizes. If faced with one of those choices, I would seek input from parents in affected areas.

Q: What should the district do to help students toward their chosen paths following graduation, be it college, career or military?

Providing options and opportunities is crucial for moving forward in our district. As a society, we have focused very strongly on preparing our students for college. This has come at the expense of preparing students for more technical careers. I believe we need to focus more broadly on building pathways for students to pursue any of those options and making sure they have the knowledge, skills, abilities and resources they need to do so.

I support offering post-secondary options to students in high school, such as dual and concurrent enrollment courses, as well as the opportunities to earn certificates and associate degrees before high school graduation. Let's invite students and their parents to support a strategic plan for students to pursue their path for higher education.

LCSD1 should consult with businesses, college admissions/counselors and military recruiters to determine what students need to succeed in those settings, but also determine what experiences and classes help students generally after they leave our classrooms. We make classes, activities and other experiences available as much as possible K-12. We ensure full staffing of counselors, school psychologists, graduation coaches and other resources to help students graduate, set goals and understand how to get there.

I support offering students many options to prepare for their future, including vocational and technical training, internships/apprenticeships, life skills and financial literacy coursework, Advanced Placement and college prep classes, as well as continuing cooperation with Laramie County Community College to offer courses for college credit for high school students. In addition, effective mentoring and guidance programs can help provide direction for students as they consider their futures.

Q: In light of the state's fiscal situation, how should the district prepare for possible future budget cuts?

We need to work with all stakeholders to strategically determine what can be cut that will have the least impact on students and teachers. It is also important that we continue to build relationships with our legislators, and work with them to find long-term solutions for our funding needs.

First, review the current situation that caused budget cuts previously. Determine if there was something we could have done to prevent or prepared for the cuts in advance. This may have prevented such a "heavy" impact for our district employees.

We probably have exhausted savings of early retirement, which means losing experienced teachers. We must find efficiencies in every aspect of operations (custodial, transportation, etc.) and, finally, look at programs. Ultimately, we must ensure the Legislature understands its responsibilities for a "complete and uniform" education required by the Constitution.

Resources dedicated to the classroom and student learning should always be the priority. The board should work with the superintendent, teachers, staff members and administrators to identify areas where reductions in spending would have the least impact on student learning and identify ways the district can use resources more efficiently.

Q: How do you feel about statewide and district-wide testing in public schools?

Tests are an easy way to provide accountability information to our communities and state. However, I believe we need to look beyond the tests and really look at other ways of showing the impact we are making and how students are learning.

Teachers need time to work with students on achieving their goals. The following factors should be considered: 1) statewide and districtwide testing should occur, and standards should be set for all schools; 2) teachers should participate in the design, implementation of how the test will be administered, and how often at their school.

Accountability (to students, families, Legislature, community) requires assessments. However, we must make sure testing does not take too much time from instruction and gives us valid and reliable results that help us do a better job. Standardized tests are only one way to evaluate students and schools.

Testing is necessary to measure performance and growth, but it should be kept to a minimum. When we do test, I would like to see the district continue to improve its use of test results to more quickly identify and help students who need extra support and intervention.