

Election 2018 Q&A

LCSD2 Board of Trustees

Three at-large seats open

Area D (no challengers)



RUSSELL FORNSTROM



JEFF KIRKBRIDE



TAFT LOVE



IVAN VENEGAS



BILLIE WILSON

Q: Why are you running for the LCSD2 Board of Trustees?

I am running to be a trustee to participate in the education of my children and the children in the district. It's my civic duty to the community to help govern, if elected.

Service on the school board must always be rooted in a desire to help kids. I am seeking another term because I have a strong commitment to see continued improvement in student achievement. I also have a personal interest because I have seven children who have, and will, attend district schools. Education has always been a keen interest of mine.

I'm running for re-election to continue progress with student achievement. Since being elected in 2014, our district has made affirming changes in the efficiency of structure and function, including: advancement in technology, curriculum and instruction development, introduction of the Model School Conference, lunch program and the start of the four-day calendar. Because I support continuing education in administration and staff to support high student achievement, I felt it was my duty to run again.

I want my district to be the best in the state. There is a ton of potential in these kids, and I want to help shape the future of the state by growing the talent locally. They are the future leaders, businessmen and businesswomen and policy-makers, and I want to help set a foundation that allows them to realize their full potential. That foundation starts with a quality education.

I am passionate about education, and LCSD2 has a special place in my heart. I have been involved in this district as a parent and a volunteer for 20 years. I believe in the importance of setting standards and evaluating trends to improve the educational environment for our students, ensuring we are providing the very best educational opportunities to each of them.

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

My top priorities include placing quality administration in the top management positions and helping to oversee the fiscal responsibilities of the district.

One of the top priorities of any school board member should be to improve student achievement. We also need to continue to strive to assure the safety and security of the school environment.

My priorities are to continue supporting students and the district through the implementation and continued development of curriculum and instruction. Our students have experienced an increase in academic achievement demonstrated in state and district testing since 2014. While focusing on the fiscal responsibilities, other responsibilities are working with legislators and equitable budgets. This comes at high determination because each component must work effectively to ensure the highest-quality education for each student.

Getting a personal financial literacy program requirement into the curriculum for high school students. Wyoming is one of five states that doesn't require this class to be included in the K-12 curriculum. It's a dis-service to prepare these kids to go to college and not prepare them for how to pay for it. We let 18-year-olds take out \$50,000 for college and wonder why we have a \$1 trillion student loan debt crisis.

There is quite a bit to learn in the beginning if I am elected. I plan to listen to my fellow board members, the superintendent and the staff of each of the schools, as well as the parents and students. I want to be a voice for the community and a committed part of the team of LCSD2 school board trustees.

Q: Do you agree with the four-day school calendar? Why or why not?

I voted in favor of the four-day school week and continue to support it. It remains popular with a large majority of the district. Friday school has worked well for lowering the need and cost of substitutes, as well as keeping teachers in the classroom.

The four-day-week calendar has proven to be successful in our district. Student growth and learning continue on an upward trajectory. Students and teachers are together in the classroom more. We also can provide extra help for students that need or desire it on Fridays, as well as enrichment programs.

I agree with the four-day calendar. I was chairman during its approval and implementation. It has a positive effect on student learning. It helped with keeping teachers engaged with students, as the number of substitutes has decreased. This is a major foundation for the overall success in student achievement.

Yes, the younger kids seem to do better with the downtime that a four-day school week offers, and older kids would have an incentive to do better in school to get a three-day weekend. I know I'd have been a better student if I could have gotten a three-day weekend.

As a parent, I did like the four-day calendar. My children were involved in sports, and it was great that they didn't miss class traveling to sports on Fridays. However, it is important that my vote as a trustee represent the needs of the district that has elected me.

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

The district should continue employing the best staff and administration possible. We can continue to offer a variety of classes, up-to-date technology and college enrichment courses.

It is important to provide students a well-rounded education that will prepare them well for whatever career path they choose. We continue to offer as many concurrent and dual enrollment classes as we can for those that plan to attend college. Any extracurricular or classroom exposure that the district can provide that would lend itself well to post-high school avenues – such as the military or technical schools – is positive.

Students benefit from programs with Laramie County Community College and the University of Wyoming. The district should continue to work and develop programs to enhance preparations for college-bound students and career readiness. This should incorporate appropriate resources for students with an inclination for a trade and military after graduation.

This next generation of students will fuel the diversity the state needs to diversify the economy, so let's open up more college courses to students that want to go to college and more trade courses for students that want to join a trade when they graduate, and give students access to recruiters to explore the options of whether they want to enlist, join ROTC in college or apply to a service academy.

Our district does a great job preparing our students for college. I think it is important to expose kids to options outside of college and provide resources toward the military, trade or workplace if they so choose that path upon graduation. This could be as simple as access to job fairs, mock interviews, ASVAB prep and résumé writing. Providing guidance toward trade schools can also assist students in making choices for their futures.

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

We should continue communication with state and local officials to monitor future budget situations. Our administration has proven to be insightful and knowledgeable in areas of fiscal challenges. Therefore, I am comfortable with any budgets issues we may face.

Over the last few years, we have worked hard to tighten our belts, as well as limit and prioritize spending. We have reduced spending in certain areas, anticipating future state funding shortfalls. Our district has been fortunate to have increased enrollment over the last couple of years.

I will work with the board, superintendent and administrators to ensure that any additional legislative cuts do not negatively impact students' education. We will continue to be responsible with the funding, while finding opportunities to advance in education. The goal is to support student achievement in its entirety.

The district should develop a prioritized spending plan that covers the needs of the students, teachers, support staff and administrators. Once those needs are met, you go right down the list, covering the essentials until you've spent all the money, and, sadly, some of the fluff items won't get covered.

I believe it is the duty of the board to be mindful of the budget, regardless of pending budget cuts. We are stewards of the taxpayers' money, and responsible to the members of our community to provide a quality education for the youth in it.

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

Currently, there is a direct link between test results and funding. I would like to see it reduced. Testing, unfortunately, is necessary for accountability and can't be eliminated completely.

Some testing is essential to allow us to assess student and district progress. But we need to seek to identify and limit assessment that is overbearing and can potentially influence or direct nearly every single thing teachers teach.

Statewide testing is appropriate for governing agencies to determine the success of a student population compared to the state. You must look at student growth in conjunction with state testing for individuals or groups of students to get a true picture of development. This is true for accountability, too.

It's fine for junior high and high school students. I would get rid of it for elementary school kids, and have them focus on learning and understanding the material, rather than spending weeks out of the school year learning to become good test takers.

I support testing students to evaluate the education they are receiving. I have reservations concerning the type of testing. I don't think the test should take priority over teaching the subject at hand. It should be an appropriate test for the subject, with consideration of student growth over mass scores.