



Lincoln Public Schools Candidate Questionnaire

Ed Zimmer, Board of Education, Subdistrict 4

1). Current fiscal constraints at the state-level is affecting State-aid to Schools. This could directly impact the amount of funding Lincoln Public Schools receives.

Can the school system operate on fewer funds, or would the district automatically need to raise property taxes to cover the shortfall?

In my time on the School Board, we have never “automatically” set the annual levy request and I am certain we will not this year either. It is also not likely that this year’s shortfall could be covered within the levy limit, though neither valuation nor state aid are clear yet. We may well face operating on fewer funds this year (especially relative to the growing numbers of students) and having to consider raising the levy slightly.

2).The Lincoln Public Schools system is nearing its general-operating-budget-levy limit. Any changes in property valuation or State-aid to Schools could place the system in a position to have to ask the citizens of Lancaster County for a higher operating levy.

Would you support asking voters to override the current levy limit?

I would only support an override request if I thought we could frame a question and conduct a meaningful campaign that had a chance of success. Given the economy, the legislative calendar, our budget calendar, and what I remember of our past requests, I cannot currently imagine a successful request so I cannot imagine asking that of the voters. If circumstances change, I will explain why I think they have changed.

3). In our Six Statements of Core Policy, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce encourages fiscal responsibility and the pursuit of government efficiencies.

Can Lincoln Public Schools be more efficient in its use of human and capital resources?

I think efficient and effective use of public funds are core principles of LPS as well as of the Chamber, so I think we should continually examine and adjust our practices. The needs of our students and state and federal requirements continually change and increase as well, so on-going examination of our work is a constant, not an option.

[and]

In what ways?

We've been focusing more and more of our resources on classroom teachers, but we must do that carefully as support positions, from paraeducators to social workers to psychologists, contribute to student success and support teachers as well as students. We've been updating computers for teachers to strengthen their ability to input and utilize student data and to communicate more effectively with parents, who are our key partners in student learning. We're giving more emphasis to distance learning, sharing resources with classrooms around the state.

4). Personnel costs are most often the largest driving force behind municipal budgets.

As a member of the Board of Education, how will you work to keep personnel cost manageable?

Personnel costs are the large majority of school expenditures, as they are with municipal budget. We carefully project the impact of personnel costs on future budgets in setting parameters for employee contracts and we negotiate for fair, sustainable settlements.

5). What are some ways in which the business community can better partner with the public schools to meet the ever-growing need for an educated workforce in Lincoln?

Partnering in college and career readiness programs is important for students to understand their options, opportunities, and the preparation necessary to realize those opportunities. Involving employees in schools as volunteers strengthens ties and understanding in both directions between businesses and educators. TeamMates and the Backpack Program of the Food Bank are excellent programs that help some of our highest-need students make progress towards productive lives in our community.

6). What will be the biggest challenge facing the Lincoln Public School system over the next 5 years?

I think the needs and numbers of students will both continue to grow, and probably at a faster pace than resources. We'll also likely outgrow our current classroom space, but hopefully not until the economy is healthier.