



RACHEL TERRY

Lincoln Public Schools Candidate Questionnaire

(Please feel free to attach your answers on a separate piece of paper)

1). Lincoln Public Schools currently functions at or near its levy limit. Any change in State Aid or property valuations could force the district to make drastic changes in its operations.

How would you propose to remedy a reduction in State Aid?

I believe the simplest solution to this issue is to lobby the Nebraska state legislature to lower the property tax levy lid for school districts. This would give LPS more flexibility in the way it administers its budget and could lead to property tax relief for Lincoln residents, a topic which is very much on homeowners' minds.

2). In addition to local property tax, Lincoln Public Schools relies on State Aid for a substantial portion of its yearly funding.

How big of a role should State Aid play in the LPS budget?

Through innovation and wiser spending, LPS could reduce its overall budget, thus reducing the "Needs" portion of the State Aid budget. Innovation and efficiency can help us to meet students' needs and improve educational outcomes while keeping spending down. During the campaign, I have heard from people in various parts of LPS who have concerns about efficiency. For example, I spoke with an employee in the transportation department who feels that \$1 million of the \$7 million budget could be cut without any difference in services to students. Some of these efficiencies include simple solutions such as buying our own buses and training our own drivers to replace the buses we are currently leasing from Omaha on a monthly basis.

3). Talent attraction and retention will be a major area of focus for the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development and the greater business community over the next decade.

What role can Lincoln Public Schools play in attracting and retaining talent to Lincoln?

Like other professionals, enthusiastic and ambitious educators have lots of ideas about how to help their students achieve, and they need the freedom and flexibility to make independent decisions. This is as true of classroom teachers as it is for building administrators. Our school district will be more nimble (and this is hugely important as our technology rapidly changes) if educators are given more flexibility. For example, a building administrator may find just the right person for a key position if given more flexibility in the salaries she can offer. Longer or shorter teaching days may be appropriate in some schools and with particular groups of students. Choices regarding technology, curriculum, and resources could be big factors in attracting educators with vision.

How can the Career Academies be used to fulfill this role?

The Career Academy will need great talent just like the rest of the schools. More flexibility in the Career Academy will be beneficial to the students who attend as they make strides toward their careers and/or college.

4). Diversity, inclusion, and parental rights have been spotlight issues facing the district over the past year.

As a member of the Board of Education, what role do you play in balancing parental concerns with the idea of an all-inclusive school community?

LPS can solve this problem simply by following their own policy regarding controversial issues. The policy (6450) states that a controversial issue is “an issue for which society has not found a consensus.” It continues: “Public schools, as an educational institution, and the individual classroom teacher have a responsibility to and should inform parents in the event that controversial issues are to be a part of the curriculum and to provide the student: 1. Opportunities to study controversial issues which have political, economic or social significance about which they will begin to have an opinion, 2. Competent instruction balancing the various and/or conflicting points of view in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice, and 3. The right to form, identify and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues as long as a balanced presentation is made of conflicting positions. 4. Alternative learning activities if the student and/or the student’s parents object to the controversial issue being studied.” If this policy had been followed, I don’t think we would be dealing with the transparency and parental rights issues we’ve seen over the past year.

5). What will be the biggest challenge facing the Lincoln Public School system over the next 5 years and how do you propose to address this challenge?

This is such a great question that I wrote a blog post about it (not published quite yet). I hope you don’t mind if I include it in its entirety.

The Lincoln Chamber of Commerce asked me the following question: What will be the biggest challenge facing the Lincoln Public School system over the next 5 years and how do you propose to address this challenge? This is an important, forward-looking question.

Lincoln is continuing to grow rapidly in population, and technology is proliferating educational options. I think the biggest challenge LPS is facing and will continue to face is meeting the educational needs of such a large, diverse group of students.

One of the keys to success here is to respect for parents' rights to make educational decisions for their children. Parents know their children best and are in the best position to make these decisions. The Duncans chose to send their children to a private religious institution for middle school instead of Irving, their neighborhood public school. This is their right and their privilege, and they don't have to explain to anyone why they did so.

Our family chose to send our kids to Irving, and this school year, in addition to many courses at our neighborhood schools, we've also been supplementing with online curricula in history and literature from a major accredited university. These courses offer rich content, a responsive teacher who is available via phone and email, and the flexibility to work at varied paces. LPS has been very good at working with part-time students; LPS counselors have effectively arranged my children's schedules and worked with them to accommodate their online coursework.

For our school district to meet the needs of all students, board members must cultivate a healthy respect for K-12 education in Lincoln, even when it doesn't fit their standard model. For example, last year, homeschooled student Anna Meckel earned perfect scores on both the ACT and SAT. This achievement is extremely rare. Instead of marginalizing homeschoolers, we should support and respect their achievements.

To take advantage of rapidly changing technology, our school district needs to be flexible and nimble. If we can do so, we can better reach all students where they are and help them reach their goals and gain some efficiencies as well.

Our brick-and-mortar schools are critically important. In addition, today, we can customize education by becoming more flexible in our thinking. Opening our eyes to the world of educational possibilities and embracing the successes around us instead of criticizing and marginalizing those with new ideas will help us to face the challenges of our school district now and through the coming years.