



Sun Prairie Area
School District
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MEET THE 2019 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

(CLICK ON THEIR PHOTO TO READ THEIR ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS)



MONTIE BOWIE



CAREN DIEDRICH



TIM FANDEK



DAVE HOEKSTRA



BOB JOKISCH



STEVE SCHROEDER



MONTIE BOWIE

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

I am a married father of three children in the Sun Prairie Area School District. My family has experienced two of the elementary schools. I work in a commercial capacity within the global healthcare industry, which has allowed me to experience many cultures and business environments throughout Europe.

My family moved to Sun Prairie in 2010 as I took on a global marketing role at Covance Laboratories, for which I worked in several capacities including sales, operational management and global marketing. My experience in this highly technical, diverse, competitive and regulatory driven environment supports my personal beliefs around quality and integrity. I also serve on the board of the African American Parents Network where we are building a strong support system for the parents and children of color in Sun Prairie. My formal education includes a BSBA from Columbia College and an MBA from Cardinal Stritch University.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

Although my current job would allow me to live just about anywhere within the United States, my family continues to be drawn to Sun Prairie because of the friends we have made along the way, the growth trajectory of the community and the many opportunities for us to serve. Serving as a member of the Board of Education is simply an extension of our family belief that you should use your unique skills to serve something greater than yourself. I believe that I can fairly and effectively represent a broad scope of the community based on my work experience, unique educational journey and my ability to fully support the equity discussion from a place of fond experience as a child within an educational desegregation program.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

I do not believe there is one “greatest” challenge facing public education. I believe it to be complex issues multiplied by an even more complex society. It is my belief that historical perceptions of what an education provides is being challenged by a uncertain future that will require immense flexibility and reconsideration of what we value as a community.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

I see an opportunity to improve our transparency through more effective communication of policy and most importantly, the considerations taken into account to build and implement policy. I also identify rapid community growth as the number one challenge as it feeds into many other aspects that are clearly symptoms of rapid growth.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

I believe consensus comes in finding shared values within the community. I intend to build this by identifying common goals, engaging the community from a personal perspective and encouraging effective and measurable communication throughout the district.

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

The basis of my campaign is the consideration of an empty chair at every meeting. This chair signifies the presence of the students which we serve. My promise is to identify and know the names of the children our decisions affect, thereby placing them at the center of the discussion and ultimately the decision. I will be more present during school hours to interact with staff and students where it makes sense to do so.



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CAREN DIEDRICH (INCUMBENT)

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

My name is Caren Diedrich and I am currently serving on the Sun Prairie Area School Board. I am very interested in all the operations of the School District. I have a degree in Marketing Education and another in Accounting. I served as Treasurer for eight years in the past and on most of the committees and Task Forces of the District. Prior to serving on the Board I was on committees for four years. My youngest son, Mike, and his wife, Angie, graduated from SPHS; one grandson has graduated from SPHS and my two granddaughters are on track to graduate from SPHS. I have lived in Sun Prairie for 29 years.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

When I was doing my student teaching I was lucky enough to be shown many of the workings of a school district. The interconnections of Building Maintenance, Nutrition, teacher development and student achievement all become part of District success. District success is measured by the success of the student as an adult. I found the work of a School Board Member fascinating, complicated, challenging and sometimes sad (expulsion hearings). I ran for the Board for the first time in 1998 and I find it to be the hardest job I have ever had. Balancing, prioritizing and making decisions is never ending for a Board Member. I want to continue this absorbing work.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

I have a corral of important issues that rear their head. Money is like a nag, always part of the conversation from class size to block scheduling to staff compensation. In Sun Prairie, we must keep our eye on growth. Legislative decisions change established patterns in student learning, revise district financing, and may alter the working relationship of the district workforce.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

Closing the GAP and bringing all students up to their highest potential is our challenge. We continue to train our teachers and students. Now we must enlist the aid of Community Schools and the Boys and Girls Club to help us.

Opportunities include expanding a summer school program that is already “Best in State.” Expanding our menu of Advanced Placement classes at the High School is an ongoing challenge. A critical opportunity is to create a compensation and benefits package for our staff allowing them to shift compensation to benefits as needed and to reduce benefits when they are not needed. We have an opportunity and an obligation to our staff and students to implement a disciplinary system. We need a system that responds quickly to classroom disruption and allows teaching and learning to continue.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

The Sun Prairie community has been terrific. They have built schools and supported their athletic teams. They come to the plays and musicals and listen to the direction the district is taking. Keeping our staff involved and fully informed before new policies or changes are made is key! Often one school will “test” a new program. This allows teachers who have lived with a new program to attest to its surety or suggest corrective steps prior to full implementation. Clearly outlining what is expected of the students in their school will bring the news home to parents. There is an extensive community engagement plan that includes social media of all forms. In addition, face to face meetings with many community groups are ongoing.

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

Not ALL decisions are student focused. Broken water fountains need to be fixed, as do leaky roofs and parking lots with potholes. The majority of us can use the “Ordinary Reasonable Prudent Person” measure to make those decisions. After every School Board meeting, we have a debriefing and ask ourselves “What did we do for kids tonight?” We comment on spending too much time on non-kid issues. The majority of District Office staff have been teachers. The Principals, Associate Principals, Assistant Superintendents and the Superintendent have been classroom teachers, so they are steeped in the tradition of concern for the whole child. We, as a Board, have one thing at the top of our various agendas - “Every child, Every day.”



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TIM FANDEK

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

Education has been my passion for the past 17 years of my professional career. As a past elementary, middle, high school, and college adjunct instructor, I have a true understanding of high-quality education. Over the years, I have strategically collaborated with multiple school boards.

My wife and three children selected the SPASD to build our home and raise our children five years ago. With three children attending SPASD schools we directly see school board policies and procedures come to life. I volunteer in the classroom, coach multiple community sports, and participate in our parish.

In my current role at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), I have the opportunity to lead a non-profit student organization, participate on state and national boards, and conduct financial management. Within my role as an education consultant, I have the unique perspective of reviewing strategic initiatives that have been implemented around Wisconsin and the country.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

Over the course of the past 5 years, our family has been directly impacted by the overcrowded schools and significant district growth. With the upcoming referendum and strategic plans for secondary space, I truly believe the future of our school district and community will be decided within the next 3-5 years. Therefore, my perspective as parent, education consultant, and past educator will be invaluable to the Sun Prairie Area School District and School Board.

As a Sun Prairie resident, I have had the opportunity to become connected to the community by volunteering within the school district and coaching youth sports. Within each of my volunteer experiences, I have had community residents (including school district employees) encourage me to run for the Board of Education.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

The greatest challenges of public education include employee retention/recruitment, student engagement and differentiation.

Employee retention and recruitment is a challenge in Wisconsin and throughout the country. Competitive compensation is the starting point; however, teachers remain passionate and stay within their position when they are empowered in a collaborative, respectful work environment. A positive and supportive climate and culture extends beyond compensation.

Student engagement and differentiation is a daily challenge for all school district staff. In this fast-paced world, students can search for an answer on the internet. Consequently, the practical application of learning is more important than finding the solution. To increase student engagement, students need to find value in the learning experience and be able to apply the learning directly to their life.

Differentiation between learning abilities, race, and ethnicities is another huge challenge in public education. This will be addressed in Question 4.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

Rather than expanding on challenges, let's turn challenges into opportunities. First, employee retention and recruitment. SPASD has strategy in place to address employee compensation if the referendum passes. Retention and recruitment only begin with compensation; therefore, through critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication SPASD can strengthen the district culture. SPASD needs to develop a pipeline for the future.

Innovative programs and student engagement are evident throughout the district. Moving forward SPASD will be required to report their [College and Career Readiness requirements](#) on their annual accountability report cards. Consequently, the SPASD has the opportunity to strengthen and invest in 5 requirements and build on student engagement.

Finally, differentiation. Strategic recruitment to reflect and represent the diversity of our community and students is a must. At this time, SPASD has an approximately 13% diverse staff; whereas, the district student enrollment is 38% diverse. This directly connects with student engagement and success.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

Strategic communication. In order to build consensus and support, you must listen first. In addition to listening, compassion and empathy are the foundational skills that must always be displayed. Within SPASD Board of Education, all board members should be treated with equal voice, representation and respect. Within the district, employees should have strategic opportunities to be heard and supported. Within the community, residents and district partners should help provide the vision and direction for the district.

The pillars of success for the Board of Education include (SPASD):

- (S) – Students: Focus for all decisions
- (P) – Programs: Innovation, student engagement, adult/community opportunities, and College, Career & Civic Readiness
- (A) – Advocacy: Positive and supportive voice for all stakeholders (students, district & community)
- (S) – Staff: Retention and recruitment – staff is the heart of the district
- (D) – Diversity: Investing in diverse staff, resources, and strategies to illustrate their core values

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

To begin, leverage the student representatives that sit on the SPASD Board of Education. Strategically have these student leaders actively participate in the majority of the meeting. Beyond board discussions, provide these student leaders opportunities to connect with their peers and report on designated topics.

Moving beyond the student representatives, create opportunities for students to provide the Board of Education their comprehensive learning experience – showcasing strengths and opportunities for positive change within the classroom, school, and district.

District staff and parents should have the opportunity to advocate for positive change on behalf of the kids. Improvements illustrate growth not weakness.

As a parent and professional in education, we need to continue celebrating all student success. In addition, by strengthening community partnerships (from business partners, retired volunteers, to community non-profit organizations), will help build strong school experiences that will positively impact all of the diverse SPASD students.



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DAVE HOEKSTRA (INCUMBENT)

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

I have been on the Board for the past 4 years and have been elected Treasurer and Board Governance Officer. I am the Board's representative on the City of Sun Prairie Plan Commission. In my professional life I am a mechanical engineer and work primarily with school districts in Wisconsin performing facility assessments and assisting districts in developing facility master plans. I interact often with school boards of other districts. I teach Sunday school and volunteer at various community organizations. I grew up in Madison and attended Madison public schools. I have lived in Sun Prairie for 21 years, have been married to Pam, a Sun Prairie native and graduate, for 28 years. Both of my kids attended SPASD from K-12.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

After serving 2 years as a citizen representative on the SPASD School Board Planning Committee, from 2012 -2014, I was encouraged to run by the School Board President. I knew the administration and board members, saw the good things that were happening within the SPASD and believed I could contribute to the continuing success of the district. After 4 years on the Board I have been part of many initiatives, big decisions and successes within the district. We continue to have many big decisions ahead of us and are really focusing our efforts on students and student success. I believe I still have much to contribute to elevating the SPASD to a truly elite performing district and want to continue being part of the team driving success for ALL students.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

I believe the greatest challenge is to provide ALL students a great foundation for future success in an ever-changing world. Students have changed, education has changed, technology has changed, and new skills and careers are in our student's future. We need to continue to change how and what we teach our students and provide options for learning that best suit each student. We need to have options and programs available to help kids develop the skills, habits and knowledge to truly become career and/or college ready when they graduate, not just fill their heads full of information. We need to be innovative and personalize the learning experience for each student and make it as engaging and relevant to the real world as possible. Get away from the "cookie cutter" approach and allow students to choose their foundational path for future success.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

I see the opportunity to take the SPASD district from a good district to an elite district which will be the model for districts to follow. I believe it starts at the Board level with the Board focused on students and student success and robustly and transparently monitoring performance. I believe we need to foster a positive culture, be innovative and align all resources and staff efforts towards common goals.

The achievement gap is a big challenge. In order to become an elite district, we will need to close the achievement gap and raise the achievement for all students.

The status quo is a challenge; not embracing change which is needed to more closely align how we educate and what we teach kids with the real world.

Becoming a high achieving organization, from top to bottom, aligned around common goals is a must in order to become elite.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

I believe the community has been very supportive of the school district. To continue this support, we need to engage with the community on an on-going basis in intentional ways. The School Board Key Communicators group is a good example of this, as are the citizen committees that the district convenes to address specific tasks such as space planning, boundaries and naming of new facilities. I believe we also need to engage the community to understand their expectations and desires for the SPASD. On-going community surveys, forums and focus groups can be used for this. Lastly to maintain the community's support, we as a school district need to operate in an open and transparent manner and operate in a manner consistent with the expectations and desires of the community.

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

I believe it starts at the Board level with a dedication and commitment to a high performing board governance framework in which we focus on students and student success and adhere to setting the goals and expectations of the district, allowing the administration to implement appropriate strategies and robustly and transparently monitoring progress towards our student achievement goals and expectations. I can help keep the focus on students by seeing all decisions from a student perspective. Ask "How does this benefit students?" and "Does this contribute to student success?" Lastly, at all conversations at the board table and in public I will bring the students perspective into the discussion and let everyone know that student success is the primary goal of the district and all decisions should support student success.



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BOB JOKISCH

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

I have 30 years of education experience with University of Wisconsin System Administration, working collaboratively with leadership and staff of 13 four-year campuses and 13 two-year campuses, other state agencies, and school districts. I know how to get things done in education. I also have 33 years experience in public/government budget and finance, developing and managing large budgets. This taught me the importance of managing tax dollars. I have lived in Sun Prairie for 24 years and both of my children attended schools in the Sun Prairie Area School District. I currently am a volunteer tutor at Prairie View Middle School through the Schools of Hope. I also volunteer with the Sun Prairie Action Resource Coalition (SPARC) and have volunteered with Wisconsin Harvest for over 15 years. I have an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Illinois and B.A. in Liberal Arts from Marquette University.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

With thirty years' education experience, I was eager to continue serving my community and helping students achieve their educational goals. Now that I am retired, I have more time to devote to the demands of the School Board. In addition, I was encouraged to run by my colleagues with the Sun Prairie Action Resource Coalition (SPARC) and the Dane County Democratic Party.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

The greatest challenges facing public education are:

- Addressing the achievement gap: School districts need to first create an environment that respects and values diversity. In addition, there needs to be collaboration between the school district and the city, county, and community organizations in providing resources to support success for all students.
- Recruiting and retaining quality and diverse teachers: The number of college students majoring in education has decreased in recent years as students find other career paths more lucrative and less stressful.
- Funding schools adequately and in an equitable manner: With increased demands in other areas for public funds, such as medical costs for an aging population and the country's infrastructure needs, increased funding for public education has become more difficult. Providing funding in an equitable manner is also more challenging, as policy makers need to pick winners and losers.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

The opportunities and challenges of the Sun Prairie Area School District both revolve around managing the overall growth of the community and the growing diversity of the community. With the growth of the community, the district is able to add educational facilities to serve the growing number of students. This allows the school district to add facilities that better address educational needs, such as more flexible spaces and educational spaces that utilize technology more effectively. The growing number of students also allows the district to add new staff that addresses changing district needs to a more diverse community with varying student needs.

Challenges for the school district include addressing an increasingly diverse student population. Students from various cultural and economic backgrounds, in addition to students with disabilities and other needs, require staff who have the training and background to address these needs and support success for all students.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

I will work to develop a shared vision, supported by policies, for the Sun Prairie Area School District. Communication is the key to building this shared vision. External and internal stakeholders need to know that they are being heard and are part of the decision-making process. I plan to meet with administrators, school teachers and staff, SCO groups, and the public to gain their input on the school district as we collaboratively develop this shared vision and policies. If internal and external stakeholders are part of the development of the school district vision and policies, they will support the work of the school district.

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

I will work hard to give a voice to all constituencies in the school district. Teachers, staff, and students need to be heard with their concerns and so does the public. The National Association of School Boards (NASB) states that: "Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals." The vision for the school district, focused on students and supported by policies, needs to be a vision shared by internal and external stakeholders.



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STEVE SCHROEDER (INCUMBENT)

Please tell us a little about yourself and what prior life experiences you have that you feel uniquely qualify you for service as a school board member (family, professional experience, education, time in Sun Prairie, etc.).

I have lived in Sun Prairie for the past 14 years. In 2011, I served as a citizen representative on the District's Finance Committee. I was appointed to the Board in 2012 and have served the past seven years. My wife, who is a high school math teacher in a neighboring district, and I have two daughters who are both in the SPASD (CHUMS and Bird). I have served as an educational administrator my entire career and have a doctorate in Educational Leadership. Growing up poor, I have tried to be an advocate for some of our students and their families who do not feel like they have a voice. I have tried to bring a focus of equity to the Board while working in a collaborative manner to bring people together. The Board has elected me as Vice President for five years and President this current term.

Why did you decide to run for the Board of Education?

When I decided to get involved with the District, I did so because I care deeply about public education. As a product of Wisconsin's public schools, I knew the education I received helped me out of poverty. As a first-generation college student, I also benefited from the public universities in Wisconsin. The main issue that propelled me to become more involved with the SPASD was ACT 10. I was dismayed how elected politicians were treating educators, including my daughters' teachers, staff members and my wife. Public education needs champions and people who will fight for it. Public education also needs leaders who will bring people together to make positive change for children. I have tried my best to do just that.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing public education?

I believe the greatest challenge is the opportunity/achievement gap. Simply put, we are failing too many students and we must do better. Wisconsin has the largest gap in the country. Here in Sun Prairie the gap between white students and students of color, students with disabilities, and lower socio-economic students is unacceptable. We cannot continue keeping the status quo and expect the gap to close. We need, and have, strategies in place to address this problem. Of course, change is not easy. My children are learning math differently from how I learned it. I have to trust the experts as they educate my, and all of our, children. We have asked a lot of our faculty and staff and they have always stepped up to do what they do so well. In return, we will ensure the compensation, benefits, and working environment is the best possible.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in this district?

I do not see any challenges, only opportunities. And we have so many opportunities. We are beginning to see positive results in literacy and mathematics, especially with students of color, special needs, and lower socio-economic status. The work around Social & Emotional Learning inspires me every day. This community supported building two new elementary schools and will hopefully approve the building of a new high school. The growth of personalized learning is exciting to see. We have the most dedicated, committed, and loyal group of faculty, staff, and administrators who love, challenge, support, and inspire our children every day. We have the pieces in place to be the most amazing school district not only in Wisconsin but nationally. We need to continue to align the district and work collaboratively for the benefit of ALL of the students we are privileged to serve.

How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

We need to tell our story. In my seven years on the Board, the District has greatly enhanced its communication to the community. Newsletters (both print and electronic), social media, and a district radio program have all helped educate the community on the great things happening in the SPASD. In addition, the District has worked in collaboration with the Mayor and City Council of Sun Prairie, the police chief, fire chief, and many businesses to garner support for one of the fastest growing school districts in Wisconsin. It does indeed take a community to educate children. The referendum in November 2016 passed with almost 65% support. This community supports the school district and our children in particular, but we must continue to communicate and find areas where we can be working together with the greater SPASD community.

How can you help to be sure that students stay the focus of all decision making?

It is imperative that students are, and will always be, our focus. The Board has changed its governance structure, in which I chaired, to become less focused on the operational elements of the district and more focused on developing policies that ensure student success and operational excellence. We often ask ourselves after a board meeting, "How did this meeting enhance student achievement?" And if it did not, we did something wrong with organizing that particular meeting. There are many stakeholders in a school district and at any given time some of those stakeholders will be upset. But we must not lose focus on the most important stakeholders, and that is our children. Being an educator and the father of two daughters in the SPASD helps me remember the reason I do what I do.



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