

1. Why am I interested in serving on the Litchfield Elementary School District Governing Board?

With the current issues facing our school board and the unexpected vacancy, our board needs someone who is familiar with laws applicable to school boards as well as the challenges and issues facing our community. I am qualified to fill that role and I am dedicated to our community and to supporting public schools in Arizona.

There are many issues facing LESD, and we need community engagement and the help of people who will put the welfare of the students, teachers, and staff first. We also need people who can behave in a civil manner, even when faced with uncivil behavior. As a litigator, I am often faced with confrontation and contentious people and believe I can remain professional, even when I disagree.

I am interested in serving our district as a board member because I want our district to succeed, our staff to excel professionally, and our students to obtain a quality education. We need to continue our tradition of excellence, and I believe I can help the board do this.

2. What is your vision for education in our community?

My vision for education in our community is for LESD to meet the changing needs of our students, whether it is changing demographics, new technologies, improving mental and physical health, helping our employees develop their professional skills, or helping the students who fell behind last year regain lost ground. We need more community engagement within our schools to learn what our students need and the best ways to meet those needs. We need to hear from students, parents, and teachers on what works and what doesn't work. As a parent, we need to keep in mind that while we have high educational goals, our students need fun. All work and no play is not fun and does not foster a desire to learn and engage. Play, especially for elementary school students, is key to developing minds. Also, I would very much like to see our district be open to change and to move faster when making decisions and implementing new strategies. If a program or method that we are using does not work, we need to change. In my opinion, LESD has been slow to change in the past. While I appreciate reasoned decision and caution, there comes a point where inertia presents a roadblock. I would like to see LESD eliminate the roadblocks for the good of our students and our community.

3. What is your philosophy on the role of a Governing Board member?

My philosophy is that board members are trustees. They are trustees of public funds, education, careers, and the community. It is each individual board member's duty to see that funds are used for the purposes of education and that students, staff, and teachers have what they need (or as much as funds allow) to do the best job possible. Board members should listen carefully to the recommendations of school administrators, as they are the experts and they have the skills, training, and experience to make recommendations on how funds are spent and what policies should be adopted. I also believe it is a board member's responsibility to question certain recommendations and methods when they are not working or if they seem wasteful and to ask for change as needed to meet the needs of our community.

4. What would you do as a Governing Board member to improve school and student achievement in the Litchfield Elementary School District?

I would look at schools with similar demographics who are excelling in the areas where LESD is weak (i.e., math). I would look at the programs they are using in the areas of student discipline, math, mentorship, etc. and see if there are cost effective changes that LESD could make to help improve our scores and student engagement where necessary. My preference would be to obtain trial programs that compete with Moby Max or some of the other programs that have been in place for years and have students, parents, and teachers try them out and provide feedback as to their preferences. I know from my own kiddos that our current discipline method (very expensive) (requires deep breathing, pretzel arms, etc.) is loathed by students in the upper grades and does not work—we need information on what other programs are available and how these programs work, especially in light of our changed demographics. We need to accelerate the speed with which we act as well—our students don't have time to wait 3-4 months for new recommendations. In some areas, what we are currently doing isn't working for all of our students, and I'd like to see alternatives implemented sooner rather than later. Also, we need to stop treating all of our schools as having the same needs—our schools differ vastly in terms of enrollment, test scores, and parent involvement. Resources need to be allocated accordingly.

5. What issue in the Litchfield Elementary School District are you most passionate about?

As a working parent who had kids at home learning last year, my passion is addressing the mental health and educational needs of our students. Last year, our district was online only from mid-November to mid-March. As a parent, I know that to even begin to meet the mental health and educational needs of our students, we need to keep the schools open. We also need to do our best to make school fun again and get students engaged and interested so that they care about school and learning. We have huge deficits in math right now. If we force students to learn what they missed last year, as well as everything they need to know this year, it will be harmful. Instead of torturing the students with more worksheets and lectures, they need math games and fun tools to make catching up on math tolerable, if not fun. As a kid in the Cartwright Elementary School District, I played in the band and was in dance. Being able to participate in dance and in the band made 7th grade math tolerable, because after math, I had band.

Besides sports, which are available only to students who are physically capable and who make the cut in terms of skill, there are presently no extracurricular clubs or activities of which I am aware at the middle school my daughter attends. There is no drama, no debate club, no environmental club, no cooking club, no language club, no gamer clubs, no coding clubs, and no science clubs. It is all study, test, repeat. That model does not promote student mental health or engagement, nor does it create well rounded students who will look forward to high school and college.

6. What do you feel are the most urgent needs/issues facing the School District? How do you balance the competing interests from District employees, students, parents, and taxpayers?

The most urgent needs/issues facing the District are: 1) increasing/maintaining funding; 2) keeping students and staff healthy; 3) making up lost learning from 2020; 4) hiring qualified teachers and staff; 5) dealing with community politics; and 6) competing with charter schools.

The competing needs must be balanced with civility and grace. I do believe there is common ground—we need to find it and build from there. I tend to look at the various options and try to find the worst- and best-case scenarios. . . if we do X, what is the best and worst that will happen? I ask, "what if we do X and what if we don't do X?". . . I also like evidence and generally base decisions on information. There is more than one solution to almost every problem. If a constituent comes to us with a problem and a

recommended course of action, we need evidence that the course of action is wise and that it has worked. If people cannot present solutions, then I will listen to them and then seek a solution.

7. How do you discuss topics where there is a strong disagreement and remain civil? Said another way, how can the Governing Board work together with differing opinions?

First, the Board needs to understand that each board member is doing the best that he/she can, even if we disagree, and that our actions affect others, either positively or negatively. We need to think before we opine at meetings and ask ourselves what the goal of our speech is. Is it to communicate, educate, persuade, or inform? Will it work? Will it make a difference? If the answer is no, then we need to evaluate whether an opinion needs to be shared. Second, the Board needs to remain civil and do its best to present an example to the community. Third, we need to find common goals and areas of agreement. As often as possible, focus on the areas of agreement. Fourth, put topics to a vote of the majority of the Board and move forward. Once the Board has voted on something, it becomes a common goal, and we all agree to support each other and move forward.

8. Decisions related to policies and actions taken on behalf of the School District are conducted as a Board-majority vote. How will you ensure that you are able to support the decisions made by the Governing Board, even when you are not part of the majority?

I am a believer in the democratic process. If an informed decision is made by a vote by the majority of the Board, my dissent is shown by my “nay” vote and that is enough. After that, I would support the Board’s decision because I support the process.

9. Describe how the School District can encourage involvement and participation from families who have felt disenfranchised from their local school communities.

This is tricky—I have personally encouraged folks who have felt disenfranchised to come to Board meetings, sit on site council, attend discussions of the equity statement, etc. and although many have promised to come, they have not. We ask a lot of our teachers, staff, and administrators already. The online, text, and email surveys and messages that are sent by the District (often in great volume), often do not get read—they fall into the same spam folders as investment opportunities from foreign princes. I do not always respond to a robo-call or to an automated survey, but if someone calls me personally, directly, and asks for my opinion or help, I will respond. I will answer a direct and personal request each and every time.

We need more personal connection. This will not be popular, but I think we should ask teachers/administrators/volunteers to personally connect by phone with a parent or two each week? Not just leave a message or text, but speak to a parent, check in, and ask about their concerns for the district, what their priorities are, what good or bad has happened in the classroom lately, what is working for them and what is not, etc.

Perhaps we make periodic “public service announcements” in English and in Spanish and put them on YouTube videos for parents to watch? We can explain what we are doing as a District (succinctly) and send the video links with our “remind” texts. Also, we can look at schools who are successful at community engagement and see what they are doing.

We have busy families who work, so maybe evenings during the week aren't such a good time for curriculum nights, conferences, board meetings, etc. Maybe occasionally plan something on a weekend for those folks who cannot attend weekly events? If they can take turns attending a weekend event so that it is an inconvenience only every few months, perhaps it won't be too burdensome.

10. Describe what the ideal relationship should be between the Governing Board and the Superintendent.

The relationship should be professional and arms' length. The Superintendent is the professional with the training, skills, and knowledge to make decisions and recommendations regarding academics, staffing needs, etc. The Governing Board should respect the Superintendent's professional knowledge and recommendations yet hold the Superintendent to a high standard of achievement. If the Superintendent and the District are not performing, then the Governing Board needs to look into the reasons why. Is it a lack of resources? Is it a lack of community support? Are we meeting our students' changing needs? If we aren't meeting state goals, how is our achievement compared to our achievement last year? Is it better or worse? If worse, why? If better, why? What can we do to help the Superintendent do her job? Do we need to bring in an outside consultant to improve professional performance or development? And if the resources are being provided and we are still not seeing progress, the Board should do what any supervisor/employer would do—implement an improvement plan with specific goals, provide additional training, set metrics for continued performance, and make decisions accordingly.