204 Candidate Questionnaire

Name  Susan Taylor-Demming
For how long have you lived in our school district?
25 years

What is your vested interest behind your desire to serve as a school board member?
A personal stake is prohibitive for a school board candidate while serving as a district representative and I will continue to adhere to that responsibility going forward. I desire to continue serving as a school board member because I am passionate about successful gains for all children in our district. I am proud of my collaboration with current members and wish to continue to provide policies and direction creating an environment where the specific needs of every one of our children are remembered as we lay the foundation for their academic, social, and emotional growth. I have been privileged to serve on behalf of our students, teachers, staff, and all district constituents. I would be honored to serve and represent you again.

1. What are the practices of an effective school board?
The IPSD 204 school board is recognized throughout DuPage County, the State of Illinois, and the Illinois Association School Board leadership as an extremely functioning Board. We were asked at the last in-person state association meeting (2019), to conduct a panel on the principles and tenets leading to our exemplary success. I am proud to be a community leader on an effective school board. The principles we follow are:

A) The Board should continually clarify our district’s purpose regarding the benefits distributed across our district. We are focused on student learning and how effective we are in providing student learning. Our district mission, purpose, goals, and policies guide us as we make decisions. We always keep the mission in mind and that allows us to remain in alignment with another, to “row in the same direction”.

B) Our Board is community minded. A main cornerstone of each board member is community engagement. Boards must listen and engage community members to hear diverse perspectives. Understanding the variety of issues happening in the community ensures a board is open minded and not overly subjected to special interest groups. We readily engage with Naperville and Aurora governmental bodies to ensure we provide input on civic issues that impact our school district.

C) Our Board accepts responsibility for our actions and decisions. We respect each other, even when we disagree. We create a respectful and productive atmosphere, embracing trust, vulnerability, and a safe environment. We all know each board member is there for the best interests of all children in our district. We know we are not perfect, do not have all the answers but we like each
other on a personal and board level and are open to feedback to help us grow. We are willing to have tough conversations but avoid cynicism and sarcasm. We are tough on the issues, not on each other.

**D) Our Board monitors our performance.** We follow OMA (Open Meetings Act) guidelines. We follow norms that guide the way we work together. We ensure we stay in the lane of the board’s work and don’t cross over into the administration or superintendent’s work. Norms have allowed us to stay focused on the work of what is best for our students. We each evaluate ourselves as a team and individually after each meeting. We annually have IASB leadership guide us through a board self-evaluation and reflection.

**E) The Board hires a superintendent and is responsible for student achievement.** A school board has one and only one employee – the superintendent. The superintendent and district are accountable for meeting student learning expectations. We set clear processes for student and staff success. We endeavor to have a strong working relationship with our superintendent. There is mutual respect, give and take and when disagreement occurs, it is respectful and always focused on moving to a productive solution with our students benefit in mind. SMART Goals are a must – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.

**F) Board delegation of authority for superintendent leading for student success.**

Our operating parameters clearly follow governance principles and superintendent is delegated with the authority to set clear goals and plans for student learning, to manage our district and to provide leadership for staff and administration. There is definitive accountability to the board for student and staff outcomes, and our relationship is built on the ability to ask questions and receive appropriate feedback from our superintendent. An annual formative and summative evaluation occurs that provides the board an opportunity to know areas of accomplishment from the superintendent’s perspective and for the board to provide feedback to the superintendent.

2. What is the role of an individual school board member?

Each individual school board member should:

A. Be committed to equitable distribution of district resources allowing all students to reach their greatest potential;

B. Be an advocate for all students. Refuse to only represent special interest groups;

C. Support administration and staff in their endeavors to put students first;

D. Be prepared for school board meetings and specific issues coming before the board;

E. Stay abreast of educational policy affecting district decisions;

F. Be committed to collaboration and consensus-building, must be willing to listen to differing viewpoints;

G. Recognize you are one of seven, you must work together, you have no individual legal authority. You must be committed to abide by decisions made by board majority, even if your personal decision was different.
3. During contract negotiations, does the role of an individual board member change? If yes, please explain the difference.

The role of an individual board member does not change during contract negotiations. No one board member can negotiate on behalf of the district. Board members do not have individual legal authority to represent the district unless officially authorized to do so.

The district has contractual legal representation for negotiation meetings. Individual board members should be prepared to understand the issues and discuss various sides of the negotiation brought to the board by its legal representation during the negotiation process. Any negotiation though requires you to always listen and put yourself in the other person’s shoes, so understanding the side of staff is important in decision making.

4. What are the greatest challenges you see our district facing now and during the next four years?

1) I feel our greatest challenge is going to be the re-adjustment to education delivery considering COVID-19. How will education change as far as delivery format is concerned, even when “things return to a new normal”? Will on-line learning continue to play a role in everyday delivery? How long will it take for all families and staff to be comfortable with returning to in-person instruction and how will our district adjust?

2) Providing the appropriate resources for student’s who have experienced learning loss this past year. How do we evaluate student’s academic status? How do we manage classrooms where we may have a wide range of grade level preparedness?

3) Managing our financial resources even more closely as we await the state determination if they will change the way they fund K-12 school districts. Evidence Based Funding has provided a little relief over the past 3 years, but if the state changes funding metrics, our district may face budget challenges once again.

4) Providing access to proper resources to support staff and students socially and emotionally as we face the effects of COVID-19. Grace and patience will be critical from the community as support for staff will be needed as everyone adjusts to whatever the “new normal” looks like.

5. As a board member you will be regularly charged with making decisions that will impact 27,400 students, 3,100 non-certified, certified, and administrative staff members and this large community as a whole. From whom will you seek counsel to help you formulate informed opinions that will lead to you making quality decisions?

1) In order to make informed decisions, I first ask for clarifying information from the administrator responsible for the specific area in question. 2) Most often, I will speak with our Chief School Business Official for illumination regarding the financial impact of a decision. 3) I also will visit our schools throughout the year to gain a clearer picture when we are faced with potential transformational issues. COVID-19 has brought an
unprecedented situation to our doorstep, so to get a glimpse from a staff and building perspective, I visited schools at each level. I spoke with staff who were working in the buildings, had a chance to say hi to a couple of classes remotely and to speak with school administrators to see how staff who were working from home were doing. Most of all to let staff/administrators know they have board support. 4) And in situations where the decisions will impact families in a large manner across the district (ex. When re-districting occurred in ’17-’18), it is vital to have family and staff in-put. Listening is key for me as I seek to make quality decisions.

6. **What is your role as a board member in supporting the District 204 Equity Belief Statement?**

   Our board created the Belief Statement, and I chaired the process we embraced to create the statement, so I am a champion of the statement and the ensuing equity process. As a board member my support of the statement and our equity initiatives in the district should be clearly visible to all district constituents. My equity support should be in every aspect of our district from our curriculum to employment.

7. **How do you respond to a neighbor who tells you that a focus on education equity could take resources away from some students while overserving others?**

   I would share with my neighbor that our district is entrusted to provide an equal opportunity to all students in our district. In some cases, and in order to do that, equitable resources must be employed. For example, there are certain goals and objectives a 9th grade Algebra I class should walk away with by the end of 2 semesters. Class A may have most students who have received out of school assistance and are progressing quickly through their year-long course. Class B may have students who require additional assistance to ensure they achieve the same level of achievement by the end of the year (this could mean summer school prep before 9th grade or enrichment throughout the year). Regardless of which support measure, the goal is the same – for Class B to achieve the same result as Class A – Algebra I success. Yes, equitable resources designated to achieve an equal level playing field for Class A and Class B students.

8. **What is your understanding of the Open Meetings Act as it applies to a school board, and how will you as a board member make sure that the Act is being appropriately followed?**

   The Open Meetings Act (OMA) requires our board to conduct our business meetings in public. Notice of our board meetings must be provided to the public a minimum of 48 hours in advance, although for regularly scheduled meetings, notice for the calendar year should be provided at the beginning of the school year. Our notice of meetings is required to be posted at the CEC and notice of our meetings are also posted electronically on our website. In order to conduct official business under OMA, a majority of a quorum is required, (for IPSD 204, a majority of our quorum is 3….a quorum of 7
Boards can go into Executive Session (or Closed Session) for a variety of reasons. Examples of appropriate Executive Session reasons are: A) Employee matters, including hiring, dismissal and performance discussions; B) Legal matters; C) Disciplinary Actions (staff or student); D) Contract negotiation discussions when the board is being apprised of negotiation status by our legal representations. There are additional reasons for closed board meetings, but notification is always required, and a quorum of board members must approve moving into Closed Session. Due to the fact that 3 board members represent a majority of a quorum, board matters may never be discussed with 3 board members present even outside of an official public meeting. As a board member, I will continue to ensure that I only discuss board business in official board meetings. To follow OMA, if there are 2 or more board members outside of an official business meeting present, we ensure we do not congregate by ourselves, so that no one could mistake any violation of OMA. I will continue to ensure I abide by those guidelines we have put in place for board.

9. As a board member, what role do you play in the day-to-day management of the district?

As a board member, I help set policies and procedures that allow the superintendent and administration to handle the management of the district on a day-to-day basis. Governance is my area of concern. Once a board has hired a superintendent, we clarify expectations, set the district direction, and then delegate authority to the superintendent to accomplish the goals and objectives necessary for our students’ success. There is a national adage that says, in a ballroom the board governs from the balcony, the superintendent, administration and staff can take the floor, but the board should remain on the balcony. For me, this is an excellent analogy of where my board presence should be in the district.