

Hastings Public Schools School Board Questions

1) What are your top three priorities for the HPS Board of Education?

Andrew McCarty: 1. Recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and staff. 2. Expand on existing mental health services for teachers, students, and staff. 3. Work with state and local partners to insure adequate funding for HPS.

Shay Burk: 1. Recruit and retain teachers and staff in a challenging environment – There is no doubt that the number of educators leaving the field is alarming in today’s world. We need to work with our existing teachers to find ways to retain them even when we as a district have a challenging budget. Then by creating an environment that helps retain those long-time teachers, we can have a supportive environment for then bringing in young teachers to be mentored. With a healthy working environment, we can then work to ensure those young teachers stay in our district for years to come. 2. Collaborate with local and state officials to tackle the budget and state funding issues – Hastings Public Schools is one of the poorest districts in the state due to its district boundaries for tax collection purposes and limited state aid. As such, HPS board members need to be willing to step up and work with state leaders to help make positive changes to the state aid to schools formula along with finding other creative ways to expand the district’s budget. That also means continuing to be respectful and careful with the taxpayer dollars we do have. And its important to have that money in the bank account because the largest piece of the HPS budget is administrative costs and as stated above, recruiting and retaining staff is vital to the success of our district. 3. Work to bolster mental health services for students and staff – There is no doubt the last few years in education have been challenging for students and staff. That’s why its more important than ever to ensure that we as a district are providing the tools and services needed to support both groups. Students are coming to school carrying the weight of their family issues at home and then are facing the challenges of school. It’s the same for staff members. And when the two come together, those stresses mix and it can be a negative situation for everyone. That’s why its vital to provide teachers with breaks and days off when available to give them time to refresh. Students need services and tools to learn to cope in the world we live in and schools are a great place to be able to provide those services. Accessing grants and other programs to expand mental health services needs to be a continuing focus for the district.

Jodi Graves: One of the questions I get asked most often is what issue am I campaigning on. My experience serving on the Hastings Public Schools Board of Education has taught me that education is not about a single issue. Education is about our children, our staff, and about our community. If you asked a grade school teacher, a high school teacher, and a community member to discuss the most important issue about education, you’d get three unique and valid responses. I embrace that! The most critical function I can play as a member of the HPS Board of Education is to ensure that I am listening and responding to the needs of those three audiences by looking at any issue that comes up with an open mind. With all of that in mind, the three things that I prioritize are - the fiscal management of the district; ensuring we are supporting and educating all students, and ensuring we are supporting our entire staff.

Becky Sullivan: 1. Wellbeing of staff and students 2. Recruitment and retention of quality staff 3. Communication with stakeholders

Mark Montague: Curriculum, Budget, Values & Rights of Parents.

Brady Rhodes: 1. Finding, resourcing and retaining highly-qualified, diverse staff at the capacity needed 2. Creating the best possible learning environments to educate the whole child. 3. Work with the district and the public to nurture a compelling, inspiring and unifying vision of the value and purpose of public schools in our community.

Stacie Widhelm: To be open for questions, research topics asked about before responding and be responsive to the parents, staff and students.

David Hughes: 1) Commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and define goals toward that vision. 2) Collaborate with staff and the community to establish a strong communications structure to engage all stakeholders. 3. Explore how financial literacy is taught within HPS and detail my real life experience as to why this teaching is imperative.

2) What is your vision for how Hastings can invest in the talent capital of our community?

Andrew McCarty: HPS needs to build upon existing career pathway programs and develop new career pathway programs to support local workforce development (manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, education, etc.). This cannot be done without the support and involvement from local businesses and post-secondary institutions.

Shay Burk: I think the key is to start young with career pathways programs at the middle school and high school level. There are many benefits to this. First, you are introducing young people to the job opportunities that they can find in this community. Second, you can introduce them to the businesses and business leaders that could be their future employers. By making those connections early, we're cementing that information into young minds so after they finish their education, these young people will remember and hopefully come back to Hastings to work. I believe the limits are endless to the expansion of career pathways in this community with all of the business and industry. And even if a student doesn't go into that career or take the job from that specific company by investing in our kids, they're going to feel more valued and want to be a part of this community as adults.

Jodi Graves: It can be a delicate balance between staying competitive to retain and attract staff while being responsible to taxpayers. I've always believed that it's better to retain current staff than to have to attract new staff. I've also witnessed that quality teachers make decisions based on more than a paycheck. They look for a school, a district and a community that supports them. It's our job as a school board to create an environment where our professional and support staff feel valued, appreciated, and heard. I also believe that the community plays a vital role in supporting our educators, recognizing the important role they play, and ensuring we have an environment that attracts and retains them.

Becky Sullivan: HPS isn't able to commit to that investment monetarily, but can assist with the investment in many other ways. Primarily, we can provide a quality education that prepares graduates for continuing education or their careers. We also can (and do) form strong partnerships with organizations in the community to expose kids to opportunities available to

them at an early age and encourage them to return or stay in Hastings after high school or college graduation. We also can provide jobs that are enticing to applicants because of the culture of the school and the community.

Mark Montague: Preserve the values of our community, Education not Indoctrination, Transparency and Accountability of taxpayers dollars.

Brady Rhodes: Continuing to participate in and build workplace pathway programs for manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality and others so that our local students can easily access fantastic career opportunities in their home community.

Stacie Widhelm: My vision is to really start communicating with our talent and listen to them on what matters to them and actually listen to them. From what I have researched from current talent is that the more standards the state/city adds the more testings they have to give which then takes away from the talent actually getting to do what they were educated to do, which is teach our children.

David Hughes: Teachers are the frontline of HPS and a key component in the future of our community. I believe retaining existing talent and attracting the best new teachers and staff should always be a priority of leadership. HPS should always strive to make our teachers and staff feel valued through: 1) Fair compensation based on the position, experience, and quality of work. 2) Creating an environment where their ideas can not only be listened to, but heard, and being accountable to what is heard. 3) Fostering schools where teachers and staff feel supported and appreciated for the work they do. 4) Ensure teacher responsibility and expectations are reasonable so a proper work / life balance can be maintained long term and employee talent retained.

3) Early childhood education programs help form solid foundations throughout K- 12 years. How would you propose to enhance our children's early years education as a member of the HPS School Board?

Andrew McCarty: I believe family literacy is a key component to this, in addition to outreach and engagement with parents. Partnerships with local non-profit organizations are important as well. Completion of the Morton Early Learning Center is definitely a step in the right direction, but so much more could be done to identify and engage with families in the district who struggle to maintain stability in their household. The development of a more robust social work outreach program for the district could help facilitate this.

Shay Burk: As a mother of two children who have gone through the HPS preschool program, I have seen the benefits of and definitely promote early education programming. I for one am so excited and proud that we as a community voted to support the creation of an early childhood development center in the former Morton Elementary building. It's a great use of a historic building and a wonderful way to give our youngest learners a place of their own. In my mind, the ultimate goal is to ensure that every child in Hastings has the opportunity to go through early education whether it be through HPS or another one of the wonderful programs in Hastings. That's why I believe we need to work as a community to find ways to work with families to encourage all of our parents to get their kids into early childhood programming. I'm

not pushing it for them to start learning their reading, writing and arithmetic at 3 or 4 years old. For me, it was the socialization and structure of school that it is important for kids to learn at that young age. And for kids like mine, whose parents might not know they have some issues like PT/OT or speech issues, those things can be addressed early on rather than waiting till later.

Jodi Graves: First, I think it's important to recognize the work that HPS and the Hastings community recently achieved with early childhood education at the former Morton Elementary School. I was part of the focus group that revisioned that facility. The new Hastings Public Schools Early Learning Center allows our youngest children to be better prepared for learning in a top tier environment. Now we are able to do that more efficiently than ever. This is the sort of innovation that HPS is known for - and is another example of our community prioritizing education. I also recognize that education doesn't exist only in school walls. Research shows that 90% of a child's brain is developed before the age of 5. One of our greatest investments is into the quality early childhood care for all children in our district, giving them the start in their life that is so valuable for life long success. My profession allows me to work to improve education beyond K-12 education. By bringing additional resources to the community to start programs like Communities for Kids, I have worked to address the critical need for additional childcare while increasing the quality of early childhood education. I'm proud of this work and find it to be a valuable tool in my role as a school board member.

Becky Sullivan: We took a big step this year with our preschool in getting all pre-K programs under one roof. This will enhance education because colleagues will be able to easily communicate with each other to discuss best practice. Also, hiring a principal specifically for preschool will serve as an enhancement by having an administrator focused on early learning and continually working on improvements.

Mark Montague: Listen to the needs of parents, work with community to provide quality and affordable programs

Brady Rhodes: Build off the rallying momentum of the new Morton Early Learning Center, the Communities 4 Kids initiative (that enhances the quality and capacity of our childcare centers) and keep working to ensure that children in our community are well-cared for in a quality environment that helps them be ready to take advantage of school. This means looking at all possible avenues to build childcare capacity in our community, make sure that childcare providers are well-trained and appropriately compensated, and support long-term strategies that build access, quality and capacity.

Stacie Widhelm: I believe what our community has set up currently is great. As a board member in order to keep things going in the right direction it would be a matter of asking the right questions about what that enhancement really looks like, who's responsibility it is to be to implement those needs and to ensure that we keep the budget accurate enough to support those basic needs.

David Hughes: 1) Work to build a partnership between HPS and early education providers that fosters communication and support. 2) Recognize those providers that go 'above and beyond' and acknowledge them for their contribution. 3) Support age appropriate standards / expectations and recognize the value of play based learning.

4) As an elected leader, how will you help to shape a positive, growth-oriented narrative for the Hastings community?

Andrew McCarty: HPS continues to provide high-quality public education despite major financial challenges that exist. There are plenty of people in the community who want to invest in the future growth and success of our community, and they should be reminded that strong public education is vital for community growth and development. That said, if Hastings is going to grow, we need to insure adequate funding for our schools. This is an area that I think deserves more creativity and compromise at the local level between HPS and Adams Central.

Shay Burk: Creating a positive growth-oriented narrative is a multi-layered process. The first step is to create trust and build a positive relationship between the board and the community. I think the board has done this well in the past twenty years leading HPS to become very successful in the passage of bond issues and sticking to their promises with the community. Going forward, continuing to keep open lines of communication and working honestly with taxpayers is key. As a former Hastings Tribune reporter, I spent years reporting the actions of the school district to the community. While I would be using a different platform, I hope to be as transparent and communicative with our constituents. I believe that having positive open two-way communication is key and listening to people is also part of it.

Jodi Graves: We, as a community, all have an active role in shaping the narrative and deciding what sort of community we want to be. That's certainly not limited to just elected leaders. One of the most important responsibilities of a school board member is to ensure communication and collaboration between the public and our schools. I am especially proud of the successes we've had as a school district, especially around the area of communication. The HPS app is one example of our success. The better we are at listening to the community, discussing the future, and communicating with each other, the stronger our school district will become. As an elected official, I will be a leader in promoting our successes (and there are many), not only in our school district, but in the community of Hastings.

Becky Sullivan: Hastings is a great community and a great place to raise a family. We have fantastic schools, access to healthcare including many specialties, higher education opportunities, strong faith communities, cultural events, a vibrant downtown and many businesses and organizations providing a focus on all areas of personal wellbeing. All these things are attractive to prospective residents and should provide solid examples of why this is a great community to reside in.

Mark Montague: Communication with Administrators, Teachers, Parents and Taxpayers

Brady Rhodes: So much of our community is tied to the wellbeing of our schools and the students and families that attend them! As goes our schools, so goes Hastings and vice versa. Success in one drives the other. When we place a clear priority on the unifying, community-building value that our schools bring, we shine a light on the opportunity and possibility of Hastings. Schools are a significant attractor for new and potential residents, and ensuring their success will drive a positive, growth-oriented narrative for our community.

Stacie Widhelm: Listen to who voted us in, research what their concerns are and answer properly. Growth begins with being heard and understood, if you do not have that at the core then nothing grows and all you do is create conflict with a community.

David Hughes: I don't believe we necessarily need to 'shape or spin' that narrative but rather 'spotlight'. I've heard countless stories of why members of this community love Hastings and call it home. I believe a better use of our time and energy would involve telling others (including our students) these real life stories of why community matters and why Hastings is an excellent choice.

5) Are there any additional areas of potential cooperation between the HPS School Board and other local government entities that you would support?

Andrew McCarty: I would support the (re)implementation of the Mayor's Youth Council that had previously existed; allowing students from the three local districts to be involved with local government and explore local issues that impact people in the community.

Shay Burk: There are two specific areas that I believe continuing relationships with are vital to the health and safety of our students and staff. The first is a continued relationship with South Heartland District Health Department and our local health professionals. If the COVID-19 pandemic taught us nothing else, it's that we need to look to experts in difficult times to find the most accurate and up-to-date information. Their knowledge is vital on any variety of health topics and education for our students. The second relationship would be that between Hastings Public Schools, the STARS Program and the Adams County Attorney's Office with regard to truancy and absenteeism in the district. These three entities have worked together for years to help ensure all students are attending school in ways that meet their needs and state requirements. The pandemic only made that more challenging and continuing to find ways to address issues before they go to the county attorney's office or to make it easier once it reaches that level is vital for the district.

Jodi Graves: You can look at the public and private sector to understand the impact that HPS has across our community. It's a real testament to our continued success that so many leaders in our community are HPS grads. I want to ensure that our community is able to educate and retain the next generation of leaders as well. As the second largest employer in Hastings, I believe HPS needs to be a community partner whenever possible, and I will always support efforts to collaborate with the community. We should be partners in ensuring safe traffic patterns for our students and for our residents. We need to ensure that our students have a safe place to be before and after school. We have to ensure that our students are fed properly. These are issues that involve partnerships and solutions from across the community, including local government.

Becky Sullivan: We have great relationships across the community, but always welcome more ways to partner!

Mark Montague: The community needs to be united and committed to quality education for all children which may require working with a diversified group to achieve the goal

Brady Rhodes: Public-private partnership must be a consistent, tangible aspect of schools and the communities they serve. We should never stop looking at innovative ways to partner and do our best to create service and partnership opportunities as a normal business practice for all.

Stacie Widhelm: I believe we need to team up with the local non-profits that offer services that are needed by public school students so that the school system can do what they are meant to do and that is the basics of education.

David Hughes: While local governmental involvement with schools is important, I believe the greatest opportunity for cooperation exists between HPS and the State Board of Education. As a State we elect our State Board of Education and trust them to set policy. I believe our local school board members should have a relationship with our area representative. I've had the opportunity to meet with conservative Sherry Jones, candidate for District 6, and find myself to be like minded on a majority of topics facing our school and look forward to continued dialogue with her.

6) What experience(s) or education do you have that would better prepare you for this position?

Andrew McCarty: I have previously worked and coached for HPS and volunteer with the HMS Community Garden. I have served on various committees during my time as an RN at Mary Lanning and have been a program coordinator there for the past 8 years. In addition, I serve on the Hastings Public Library Board. My various experiences have provided me with insight into the collaboration and teamwork required to implement changes, make difficult decisions, and engage with people who may hold different views and opinions than my own.

Shay Burk: I served for nearly a decade as the education reporter for the Hastings Tribune. In that time, my prime areas of concern with HPS, AC, HCS and the two colleges. I attended almost every meeting and work session of the HPS board of education for a decade which comes out to several hundred meetings over that time. Not only did I attend the meetings but I studied and worked to understand everything discussed and oftentimes followed up with staff and administration on certain issues. I visited the school buildings on a regular basis to get a better understanding of programs. Then I took everything I learned and reported it back to the community in a way they could understand. As such, I believe that I have not only a strong understanding of the operation of the district but also the duties and operation of the board of education itself.

Jodi Graves: With my professional experience as the Executive Director of United Way of South Central Nebraska, I have a unique vantage point in that I get to work with so many health and human service organizations in our community. In my profession, I see first hand the value of education. I also am witness to how obstacles, like poverty, can deprive our students of an environment that promotes learning. With a direct link between Free and Reduced Lunch percentage and test scores, poverty is a very real obstacle for so many students in HPS. As a community, some may not always see it but I assure you that teachers and educators see the negative effects every day. In my professional role, I am helping to develop and implement a poverty reduction program that would resolve some of the root causes of poverty for many families. I firmly believe this effort will strengthen the educational experience for many children. My personal experience as a mom with 2 kids currently in HPS schools means that every

decision I make as a current HPS Board of Education member is personal as it directly impacts my own kids. I understand the impact that every decision makes. More importantly, my experience as a current HPS Board of Education member has taught me that I have a responsibility to listen to ALL voices on any given issue and to base my decisions on what is best for the 3,600 students and the 500 staff members of HPS.

Becky Sullivan: I have been on the board for 8 years and feel my experience has much to offer to HPS and the community.

Mark Montague: Committed Husband and Father, Community involvement and volunteer service through youth sports organizations, church, volunteer with Royal Family Kids Camp, Current Board member/treasurer of Platte Valley Youth for Christ, Small business owner, served on past boards, fiscally conservative

Brady Rhodes: I have been involved in education as a teacher, program developer, teacher-trainer, facilitator and curriculum designer for 35 years. I previously served on the school board from 2014 - 2020 and gained invaluable experience as a productive and participatory board members, Legislative Liaison and community advocate. I work closely with the social service organizations, programs and faith communities to better serve community members, especially those on the margins. This gives me a unique insight into a school district with a 67% free and reduced lunch population of students.

Stacie Widhelm: I am experienced with working with a diverse group of people. I have been working with the public in my private business for over 15 years and that alone is invaluable experience to be able to have differences with someone but still work together. I have been educating myself on the constitution, with the school system being funded by the government then policies and procedures should be based on the constitution. I am on the local Wellspring board and feel the experience there will help me understand questions to ask about the budget. I am a researcher by nature, when I don't understand topics or where someone is coming from and I am not afraid to ask questions and question others.

David Hughes: I am currently employed as a Vice President at Pinnacle Bank in Hastings where I predominantly work with the bank's ag and business customers. Part of that work involves analyzing their business and identifying risks and threats and assisting them in mitigating those items. With nearly 600 teachers, administrators, and staff, HPS is one of the largest employers in Hastings and with an annual budget of roughly \$47MM it's one of our larger 'businesses' as well. The financial health of our public school is an ongoing concern and I'm confident my financial background would pay dividends.