

1. *What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing our public school and what are your plans to address them?*

There are many challenges facing our schools, and in my professional experience I do not anticipate a return to our former way of functioning for at least the next year and a half. Recovery from the pandemic effects, in my opinion, should be our priority over the next year. This pandemic has affected our students, educators, and schools over this past year in so many ways that there is no one right way or response to helping and/or supporting people. As a mental health first responder, I have provided on-site support for other school districts as they return to in person learning and I have seen the effects the pandemic has had on academic retention, equity of available educational resources, and the mental health of our students and staff.

This leaves the school board the tough job of developing a “new normal” where students can access their education despite COVID-19 fears and restrictions. Crisis provides opportunity for change and growth. My plan is to start by strengthening trust, which must happen between the school administrators, school board, teachers, parents, and students. Trust is built through transparency, accountability, and having courageous conversations on difficult topics. Parents need to trust the individuals working in the schools and that our school district will ensure the safety of all students.

I will make sure school administrators take a firm line in sanctioning staff who do not follow protocols, with a focus on safety. I will advocate we explore alternative educational opportunities for students who are unable to wear masks, such as outdoor classrooms. I will ask community partners who have already done this work for their expertise to lead us in this work and collaborate on unforeseen issues. I will advocate for increased mental and behavioral health professionals in school to support our inner resiliency. I will listen to the voices of students and parents, always keeping at the forefront of my mind how my privilege may interfere with my ability to accurately interpret another’s perspective.

Another important challenge that I believe needs to be addressed immediately is recruiting and developing a more diverse teaching staff for our public schools and safeguarding our school’s curriculum to ensure that it is robust, truthful, and void of racist content. The Stand for Children organization started the Center for Anti-Racist Education (CARE). Our district can utilize this resource as an advisory panel to help us review what we currently have in place, and then provide consultation on recommended changes. It’s an opportunity to do better, which is where I would advocate for our school district to start. The use of an advisory panel is important because so often “we” are not able to accurately assess what needs to be changed because of privilege. Having an outside panel supports balance, accountability, and perspective.

Question 1 continued:

I also am a strong supporter of House Bill 2001, which, if passed, will require school districts to maintain current ratios of diverse teachers to diverse students in the event of layoffs by eliminating the “last one hired first one fired” practice. Another great starting point is to have a discussion between the teacher’s union and the school board to collaborate and problem solving in order to formulate a shared vision.

2. What is your definition of equity and what is its importance in education?

Equity is the allocation of resources based on the needs of the person receiving those resources. It is important in education because it allows for all students to have the same opportunity to achieve. Equity brings all students up to the same starting line, and makes the race fairer. A good example of equity concerns was when the school district passed out chrome books/iPad to their students last year when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Passing out chrome books/iPads to all students was a demonstration of equal distribution of resources. All kids got one. Period. But, what about those students who do not have internet access from their homes? What about those students who are homeless and struggle with finding a reliable charging area for their electronics? What about students who have other responsibilities in their busy homes and no quiet place to work and study? For those students, just handing them a laptop or an iPad doesn’t get them to the same starting point as some of their peers. For those students, maybe an internet router is needed in addition to the laptop/iPad or an alternative study location with reliable internet access. Winning a race when your competition has a head start is nearly impossible. Equity allows for the starting line for all students to be as close to the same as we can make it. It gives all students an opportunity to succeed..

3. Describe the achievement gap in your district and what you think can be done about it. How could the Student Success Act Funds be used to address this gap?

The student achievement gap for the Corvallis School District has been closing over the past few years which is a great trend to continue. I believe the focus and work of our school board to improve access to education for underserved students has been beneficial with positive results. The Student Investment Account funds provided by the Student Success Act is a tool in our arsenal that we can use in changing the way we distribute our resources to improve equitable access to education. One area not addressed in our district's Student Investment Account Agreement, which explains to the State of Oregon how these funds will be used, was how we would increase mental and behavioral support in schools for both educators and students.

Question 3 continued:

As a mental health therapist, I have direct experience on how providing our students and staff with a trusted professional in the mental health and behavioral field can help facilitate understanding and communication around unidentified needs. To close the achievement gap further we need to have a clear understanding of what the barriers are from the student and families that are experiencing them. Mental and Behavioral Health Professionals are experts at listening and can help the school board target funding so our forward momentum is not disrupted. Access to mental health support in the schools, especially during these constant transitioning times, will increase student academic success and help to close the achievement gap.

4. How can schools address the learning needs of students from other cultures and languages?

As a child of immigrants, this question is very personal to me. My father immigrated to this country from Israel, and my mother immigrated from France for better educational opportunities and a chance at the American Dream.

As a young student, cultural “misunderstandings” between my teachers and my parents (with different cultural values and thick accents) were expected and happened on a regular basis. My parents didn’t understand prom, or what “show and tell” was, or why we only sang Christmas Carols for our choir’s December performance. Baseball examples on math word problems were especially frustrating because baseball is a uniquely American sport with rules my parents had no understanding of. The learning needs of students from other cultures and languages are uniquely different and varied.

To make education equitable and achievable for our immigrant students, we need to first ask them directly what their needs are and not just assume we know. We need to be mindful of our privilege and biases, as willing to be open and accountable to learning and changing.

I believe we can better serve our international students by first being curious and open-minded. How can we figure something out for someone we don’t know? I suggest we ask questions and set up a structured setting with flexible problem solving to formulate an individualized plan to support a person and/or family succeed. I would encourage the school board to be the experts on listening to the community, and for those whom we don’t know then let’s ask them to educate us on learning needs. Once we know then it is our duty to ensure equity for all. In mental health we often utilize peer specialists to help bridge gaps in understanding. Peer specialists are people with lived experience, who are able to help break barriers of understanding between therapists and clients. I’m curious if the school district can identify cultural peers to help identify the learning needs of international students.

5. What is your vision for the future of education in your community? What would be your role as a school board member in realizing this vision?

My vision is where all students look forward to going to school every day; where our schools produce emotionally intelligent students who are competitive in the world economy; where parents feel safe and included in their children's education; and where educators are motivated to work and empowered to meet their career goals. My role as a school board member is to work together with the other position holders to ensure the adopted policies and fiscal budget allocations remain aligned with the goals set forth in the Corvallis School District by our community members.

This includes ensuring that our one employee, the superintendent, is doing his job in implementing policy and managing the school's programs, staff, and facilities. My role as a school board member is that of an authentic voice of my community, and I am committed to ensuring our public schools will graduate young adults who are mentally stable and successful in whatever they choose to do. To do this effectively, I will collaborate with the other school board members and be mindful that personal perspectives do not belong in this space and will not allow myself to interfere with the global values of our community. It takes a humble yet strong voice to do this work, which I have years of professional/personal experience holding similar space, which is why I believe I am absolutely the best fit for Corvallis School Board position #5.