

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

The biggest challenges facing GAPS starts with the transition out of COVID-19 distance learning. Covid has exposed and exacerbated a gap that our most at-risk students have fallen through. While the task of expanded reopening has already begun, the effects of its closing are not to be underestimated. Disadvantaged students have fallen further behind and the district has a new challenge of playing catch up.

Covid has magnified the gap in access to school resources that falls along racial and socioeconomic lines. When physical schools were removed many of its safety nets, access to hot meals, special education services, therapy, and high-speed internet went too.

During Covid, some families were able to convert bedrooms and spare offices into mini classrooms. They were able to have parents or child care monitors supporting students as they learned. Other students had to work from crowded apartments with spotty internet and little to no supervision.

Mental health is strongly coupled with the transition of students back into school. A year at home, many in trauma, and many of our students existing in critical adolescent and teen years will all contribute to a large need for mental health support. A focus on supporting social and emotional skills, especially resiliency training, will be of the utmost importance.

There is a desperate need for counseling. Superintendent Goff said, "counselors and mental health professionals are needed and that reports of child abuse have decreased by 60 percent a day since school has not been in session because the mandatory reporters are not involved with students daily".

Students have not been able to access learning at near the same level as pre-Covid, including a significant number with little to no engagement. The biggest challenge schools have is closing this widening spectrum of skills and knowledge.

GAPS was forced to innovate and reevaluate its systems. Many of these changes were very successful and should become permanent options moving forward.

The new Albany Online was a new and successful option for some students. I have heard from parents that their children, who were struggling in the classroom model, are now doing great with online school. They were able to be more self-directed, take breaks when needed, and were less distracted by other students.

Continuing to look into digital learning practices provides another tool to help students be successful. GAPS has done all the hard work creating new ways of learning, now we need to evaluate and keep the ones that are working. Evaluating platforms like canvas for efficacy and continue to implement one to one technology.

*Question 1 continued:*

This is also a great time to reevaluate equity practices. Training staff to look at their professional practices and curriculum to be more inclusive of all students. We need to move past spending one day talking about Martin Luther King Jr. to an education model that teaches multiple perspectives of history, highlighting the failures and triumphs of many cultures and people.

It is important curriculum changes and equity practice be directed by communities that they most impact. GAPS has done and needs to continue to listen first. Now is a great time to review policies and procedures to ensure all students are provided for and treated equally and equitably.

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

Equity means making sure every student has the support they need to be successful. Everyone is able to go to public schools, but not everyone has the same access to all its resources. I had all the advantages growing up and had a wonderful experience in school. I know that not every child does, but every child deserves to. Equity in education requires putting systems in place to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success.

At the school and district level equity means making sure that teachers have the resources to design an equitable classroom and that all students have what they need to succeed. They have access to programs and strategies that enable all students to succeed. It means that there is a fair and objective way to determine student academic needs and implement support systems that serve all students.

*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?*

How could the Student Success Act Funds be used to address this gap?

- Smaller Class Size in Earlier Grades
- Enhance cultural competence in teachers and education material
- Programs to recruit/retain teachers of color
- Increase counselors and education support staff to serve as mentors and links to families.
- Wave participation fees

*Question 3 continued:*

Describe the achievement gap in your district and what you think can be done about it.

The achievement gap exists in the divide between families who have resources to take care of basic needs and spend time with their children at home. Students whose families have to work lots of hours or at odd times of the day struggle. So do families who have struggled to meet basic needs. Students bring that stress to school and struggle to learn because of it.

My work as a mediator with Linn-Benton Mediation Services and as an Acupuncturist has left me with a focus in two areas: Restorative Justices and Student Health.

Students of color in Oregon are disproportionately being disciplined in schools. The zero-tolerance disciplinary approach, while intended to be only used to address serious threats to students, has caused a disproportionate suspension of minority students and students with disabilities. It is an area of anger for many in the larger community and micro-community of our schools.

Restorative justice seeks to restore students belonging to a community and not punish them out of it. It teaches and empowers students to resolve conflict on their own and acknowledges the victim. It asks the question what is wrong, not what is wrong with you. Research has shown that these programs have helped strengthen school communities, prevent bullying, and reduce student conflicts. Proactive use of these techniques can reduce suspension and expulsion.

When children know they are protected and that no harm will come to them, they are better able to reach out to others and explore their education. When they do not feel safe this increase in stress can drag our kids down. A number of researchers have shown that chronic stress affects the thinking skills and brain development of students.

Stress hormones produced during worrisome times can shape the developing circuitry of the brain. They influence the neural connections in the prefrontal cortex which houses our executive functions. These functions include our memory, self-regulation, and cognitive flexibility. Executive functions are critical for reasoning, planning, and regulating emotions and attention. They are essential to academic success.

Student mental and physical health is affected by socioeconomic and race-based stress, which makes academic success that much more difficult. Promoting positive ethnic and racial identity rescues feelings of exclusion and improves the ability of students to focus in the classroom.

Schools and districts should incentivize and support educators in developing and using culturally relevant curricula. GAPS can improve practices for recruiting and retaining more educators of color and cultural competence.

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

Families of students from non-white ethnicities and non-native English speakers have a harder time creating solid connections to schools. Staff needs to practice empathy and have a genuine interest in learning about who students are and what their culture is about. Teachers can help students develop positive feelings about their ethnic and racial identity by exposing them to diverse role models. This requires district-wide cultural sensitivity training.

Black and brown students don't have many staff in our schools that are the same ethnicity as they are. We need to recruit more teachers and leaders who look like them and can be someone for them to look up to. The district has created a Teacher Development Scholarship Program. This Scholarship helps students of color and other traditionally underrepresented groups pay for teaching programs if they promised to return to teaching in GAPS.

*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?*

- Every student can feel safe at school.
- Every student feels that they belong and are accepted at school. That students can make connections with peers and caring adults.
- To give students a more well-rounded education that includes learning about many cultures, empathy, inclusiveness.
- To have mental health experts on our campuses every day who can support the growing needs of our students.
- To continue to have innovative technology be used in our classrooms to engage students in new and exciting ways.