

## 2023 School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: Ariel Miner

1. What is your experience with public education? How will that experience influence your work as a board member?

My husband and I have 4 children in USD 497 and I'm a product of Tonganoxie Public Schools. I'm helping to spearhead a movement, Kansans United for Public Schools, to fix the school funding formula. Last year I was a substitute teacher in 4 districts, including Lawrence Public Schools. I've seen where the system works successfully and where it can be improved, and can bring that knowledge and first hand experience to governing. I would like to help find long term solutions to budget and organizational difficulties that don't harm our community while putting students, teachers, and staff first.

2. What is your experience with organizational budgets? Elaborate

I have been poring over, reviewing, and building a thoughtful understanding of Lawrence Public School budgets for several years and am keenly interested in new insights. I have educated myself about school funding formulas, the Gannon case, and how other districts have found creative ways to deal with financial struggles. The budget is an area that needs more transparency, oversight, and accountability.

3. What is your vision for public education in this community?

I truly believe public education is the bedrock of our democracy and that we can transform our district if we work together. There is a major push across our country to privatize education which would only pull more dollars from already struggling public schools. These efforts are sometimes subtle and I think we need to ensure district decisions are representative of what the Lawrence community truly wants for our public schools. My vision is for our children to receive an equitable, high quality education no matter what school they attend in USD 497. I think we need to raise expectations of what is possible and come together for our children.

4. What would you like to see changed, added, or deleted from the district's current strategic plan?

I would add to the strategic plan an emphasis on strong partnerships with city leadership. Strong, welcoming neighborhoods are part of the city's strategic plan and I believe the success of our district is intertwined with the success of our city. If we want better outcomes we need to re-evaluate how we use data to inform decisions and recommit to prioritizing students and community in long term planning.

5. Describe your views of the roles of the school board and administration. What is the ideal relationship between the two offices?

The school board and administration are most effective if they work as a team and maintain a transparent, communicative relationship. The school board members are elected representatives of the community and responsible for setting policy, approving budgets, and advocating for students, the district, and public schools. The superintendent manages the day to day operations of the district and along with district administration makes recommendations for board approval. The Board governs the district and is responsible for hiring, evaluating, and monitoring the superintendent. A quality of a high-functioning board listed in the governing manual of USD 497 is "Board operates in the open, involves community in decision making." The community had no opportunity to be involved in the recent extension of the superintendent's contract which is arguably the most important decision made by a school board. This is not ideal and diminishes community trust in the leadership team.

6. Who do you think should have the authority to make decisions on controversial lesson topics – students, teachers, parents, school board, or state? Why?

"Controversial" is a vague and subjective qualifier - what is controversial varies greatly from one person to the next. However, if those "controversial" topics include teaching true American History, book bans on gender identity topics, or sex education, I wholly disagree. LGBTQ+ and trans rights are human rights and not a topic of controversy or something to hide by banning books. I feel the spotlight on supposed controversial lessons is just a distraction from the real issues our society faces, like not fully funding education, poverty, unaffordable housing, inadequate healthcare, income inequality, systemic racism, and climate change. Information about curriculum should be available to the public with plenty of opportunity for comment and engagement but I look to teachers to be the authority on education in their own classrooms.

7. Describe what you have learned from the recent decision to close two schools. What could we have done differently or better and how will this inform decisions you will make as they relate to budgets, staff, and educational outcomes?

I learned that our school district needs to have long term strategic plans that include working closely with city leadership, not only for financial health but to ensure student safety. Taxpayers will be paying off the debt on the school bond until the year 2030 so these families dealing with the emotional impacts and economic burdens of losing their schools will still be paying off the bond. The Futures Planning Committee was asked to vote on school closures blindly - they had no information or knowledge of which schools would be impacted or the immense consequences of their vote. This lack of transparency without any accountability is unacceptable as these are our public dollars. I think this community needs board members willing to look more deeply at systemic issues in our district.