

## **2023 School Board Candidate Questionnaire**

Candidate name: Shannon Kimball

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

I am a parent and community member in addition to my service on the school board. I have extensive experience supporting public education and our local schools. In addition, I bring my professional experience as an attorney and policy specialist working with public schools to my work as a board member. That experience, combined with my continuing commitment to center student learning in the decisions that the board must make, will guide my work to further the district's mission, the board's strategic goals, and the vision of our community for our schools.

Over the past 12 years of my service on the USD 497 Board of Education, I have supported public schools in numerous local, state, and national leadership roles, including:

- 3-time USD 497 board president;
- 3-time USD 497 board vice-president;
- 6 1/2-year member of the Kansas Association of School Boards board of directors, including serving 1 year as statewide president, 1 year as president elect, and 2 1/2 years as past president;
- One term on National School Board Action Center board of directors.

My education policy expertise and advocacy experience include:

- 12 years on the USD 497 board policy committee, leading work to create and adopt the district's first equity policy, district-wide equitable dress code policy, and protections for students and staff including antibullying and LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination provisions;
- 4 years on the National School Board Association's policy committee;
- 3 years chairing the Kansas Association of School Board's legislative committee, leading state-wide legislative platform work to oppose school privatization and voucher schemes in Kansas, to support full funding of public education including special education, and to support equal and inclusive opportunities for all students;
- Service on numerous USD 497 and other local committees, including the City of Lawrence Public Incentive Review Committee; board liaison to the Lawrence Schools Foundation board of directors and site councils at numerous USD 497 schools;
- Service on Governor Kelly's Council on Tax Reform and the Kansas Attorney General's Open Government Training Advisory Committee;

- Service on the Kansas Department of Education's Navigating Change planning committee; Kansas Teacher of the Year selection committee; and KASB and NSBA regional and national nominating committees;
- Leading USD 497's legislative agenda setting process and regularly providing testimony to the Kansas legislature on issues of concern to the district.

My education planning experience includes:

- 11 years on the USD 497 board's facilities and bond planning committee, including planning and implementation of two major bond construction campaigns that upgraded all USD 497 school buildings to provide equitable learning and working spaces across the district;
- Creation and support of district programs focusing on preparing students for post-secondary success: the College & Career Center (CCC); the national award winning College & Career Academy program; participation in community partnerships leading to the founding of Peaslee Tech and construction of the Boys & Girls Club Don and Beverly Gardner Center for Great Futures at the CCC; and establishment of the first dual enrollment college credit programs between USD 497 and the University of Kansas and Baker University;
- Leading advocate for adoption of USD 497's first 5-year strategic plan;
- Service on the National School Board Association's strategic planning and visioning teams;
- Service on the USD 497 boundary committee.

## **2. What is your experience with organizational budgets? Elaborate.**

I have twelve years of experience evaluating organizational budgets as a school board member, and additional experience as a member of the boards of directors of the Kansas Association of School Boards, Kansas Board Solutions, Enviser, and the National School Board Action Center. That experience equips me to hold organizations accountable to the community and the board's strategic goals. I have used, and will continue to use, this experience in collaboration with my board colleagues and district administration to work within the real budget constraints imposed by the state while meeting our strategic goals to increase compensation to teachers and paraprofessionals, to raise student achievement while closing opportunity gaps, and to ensure rigorous and equitable learning opportunities for all students, particularly students from historically marginalized or minoritized communities within our schools.

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

Lawrence families deserve a world-class public education no matter in which neighborhood they live. My work over the past dozen years has been focused on

realizing that vision. Despite significant challenges during the last five years, we have made progress for students and teachers. From facilities upgrades to expanding learning opportunities to increasing competitive pay for teachers and support staff to advocating for full funding of public schools and special education services for students—I have been focusing on accountability and creative solutions to our challenges.

We have to celebrate our progress while acknowledging that hard work remains to be done in achieving this vision for all. Despite a historic state budget surplus, legislative leaders in Topeka have stubbornly and irresponsibly refused to fully fund special education services. The state legislature’s shameful refusal to fully fund special education has broader implications for all students—shortfalls in special education funding result in fewer resources to support educational opportunities for everyone. And while many of the national headline-grabbing issues around academic freedom have not yet directly impacted USD 497, other recent legislative actions, such as passage of SB 180, have the potential to harm our students and staff. My vision for our schools includes standing as a board member against these harmful policies and advocating for the needs of our students and for laws and policies that let our teachers teach, let our students learn without fear, and build strong relationships between teachers, parents, and the broader community.

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

In 2018, I made adoption of a multi-year strategic plan the board’s top priority. I am proud that, as a result of that work, in 2019 the board adopted the district’s first five-year strategic plan. That plan, focused on student achievement, staff retention and recruitment, student and staff security and safety, and equity, represents the community’s goals and vision for the future of our schools.

During the 2023-24 school year, the board must re-engage in the strategic planning process. The first step in that process is for the board to seek the community’s feedback on the progress made since 2019. The board needs to learn from our stakeholders what they think is working and what they have experienced that should be adjusted. Ultimately, the vision for USD 497 through 2030 and beyond has to be more than just my plan, or the board’s, or the district’s; it has to be a collaborative vision that the community embraces for the future of our schools.

Based on my current evaluation of our district’s progress on our plan, I will be looking for community feedback on how to expand and strengthen our plan’s academic goals and support students who continue to struggle post-pandemic; how to further our

work on staff retention and engagement; and how to improve the district's communication with stakeholders and responsiveness to their input in the district's work.

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

The board governs, sets policy, and holds district leadership accountable to achieving the board's goals and carrying out the district's mission. Administration manages the district in alignment with the board's vision, goals, and policies.

To provide what our students, families, and staff need and deserve will require each board member to commit to working together as a team with district administration. To do this work effectively, the seven members of the board and the superintendent must work closely together and develop relationships grounded in transparency, accountability, trust, and a clear understanding of and respect for the roles of each member of the board/superintendent team. The district will see the greatest success in meeting the challenges that lie ahead with a board and an administration that act together, with meaningful input from the community, to move the district toward a common vision, guided by clear goals and expectations.

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

I am completely opposed to the restrictions on academic freedom and access to learning materials that are proliferating in other parts of the country. The board must support broad academic freedom. Teachers must have the freedom to ensure that students become critical thinkers and life-long learners. Parents should be well informed about what is going on in their child's classroom so they can make decisions for their own child regarding especially sensitive subjects. But those subjects are, in reality, limited (e.g., sex education). Parents should not be allowed to prevent other people's children from accessing an extensive range of reading materials or from learning about diverse subjects, viewpoints, and experiences. Teachers must be respected and trusted to evaluate the materials they use for relevance, rigor, cultural responsiveness, and age-appropriateness. The state should not play a role in this beyond setting rigorous and comprehensive learning standards that encompass the full breadth of skills and knowledge that a student should have to be a prepared and well-informed citizen in a global society.

**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?**

These decisions were going to be difficult, no matter what process or approach the district took to make them. As with any similar process, the board must assess what went well and what lessons must be carried forward to the next set of decisions.

Accountability and transparency are essential components of every decision I make as a board member; the school closure decisions demonstrated this very clearly. The board engaged staff and the community over a two-year period in multiple processes to provide input and feedback on the district's financial challenges. The board used that feedback to ultimately identify three related and essential financial goals and then used the feedback to make difficult decisions to reallocate scarce resources to meet those goals. All of this work came together to support the board's ultimate goal of better serving all students across the district but particularly those students who continue to struggle the most.

The board's budget work has highlighted for me the necessity of providing the community with clearer, simplified explanations of the district's budget and finances at more frequent intervals going forward. The district must translate the abundant but frequently byzantine information about its finances and operations—byzantine because the Kansas Department of Education and the legislature require the district to use certain accounting and reporting formats and procedures—into straightforward graphics and shareable information that helps the community understand how the district uses its funds and how the board's decisions are meeting the needs of staff and improving educational outcomes.