



JACQUELINE MCGOURTY

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Director District No. 1

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QUESTION #1

**As PTA leaders we believe that our children's education is a team effort. Describe ways in which you have contributed to this effort, and communicated with district staff, the administration, organizations, government officials, and other stakeholders to share ideas and solve problems for our students and community.
Bonus question: which PTAs do you belong to?**

RESPONSE #1

It is absolutely a team effort. This is the reason I work at establishing relationships with our legislators, communicating with them regularly, attending council meetings and meeting at regular intervals to advocate for our students. This is also the reason to liaise with the PTSA, the NSD Foundation and other local organizations (all of which I have done, but we shuffle roles) to communicate what the district is doing, where and how we could use their help and ask for their input/answer questions. I also look for the administration to be regularly reaching out and surveying the community, parents and students to get their input on their priorities and preferences, such as naming Ruby Bridges Elementary School. I make a point to interact with staff/teachers when we visit schools and of course regularly consult with Dr. Reid and her staff—to make sure all this is happening—but also to discuss the input so I can be in touch with the team. I also make myself available for any parent, student, community member, etc. who requests discussion.

Unfortunately, I don't belong to a PTA. I didn't have the privilege of sending my kids to NSD and they had graduated before I joined the board. It didn't seem right to pick one (or 3) school PTA over all the others that aren't necessarily attended by board members, so I do what I can to simply adopt them all.

QUESTION #2

One of Washington State PTA's top legislative issues is: "Supports and Funding for Students with Disabilities and Their Families". Do you think this needs more attention and if so, what would you do to advocate for supports and funding for Special Education?

RESPONSE #2

It absolutely needs more attention, starting with persuading the state to update their funding formulas and fully fund special education. This will require continued advocacy at our state and federal level for new legislation. We have been lucky in Northshore to have a generous community that has stepped up to fill the gap, but this is not the norm, and we shouldn't be underfunding basic education for anyone. I would also push to expand our inclusive practices and ensure improved accessibility included with every construction or remodel project. I monitor and report on any and all legislation related to SpEd, as well as contribute to WSSDA legislative positions (where it is also a priority) so we have the entire state organization behind that advocacy. I also contact our legislators regularly to promote it and propose action to other community organizations. I would also advertise our fabulous all-inclusive schools, like Ruby Bridges, and their amazing success.

QUESTION #3

Northshore School District has a Strategic Plan with Four Building Blocks. "Building Block 1: Equitable Access to Personalized and Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. Teaching and learning is the central function of our school system. We will advocate for standards, practices and programs that engage every student in challenging work, regardless of their current level of performance. And, because 'one size does not fit all,' we will differentiate and scaffold instruction and supports to meet the unique strengths, backgrounds, readiness, and learning styles of each student." What does Building Block 1 mean to you and how you would you approach it as a school board director?

RESPONSE #3

Building Block 1, naturally, is the foundation of our, and my, approach to education at Northshore. Equity was, and is, uppermost in my heart and goals when I joined. It is at the core of everything I do, every discussion, every decision and informs the emphasis on individualized education. You can't have equity until every student receives the resources they need to meet them where they learn best. This has been my focus from the beginning. Every student learns in a unique way. So we need to provide every student with every opportunity to learn and succeed that is unique to them. For every opportunity, every success reported, my first question is whether it was accessible to all our students and, if not, how can we make it so. When our high graduation rates and test results are reported, the first question is; Who are the small percent of students who aren't excelling and what can we do to support them and provide what they need? This is the reason for the emphasis on flexibility and innovation in teaching. We can't just rely on the same approach that has always been used, but need to begin fresh with every student. You're not just teaching a curriculum but the student. So the curriculum we approve should also have this same focus.

QUESTION #4

Two of Washington State PTA's top legislative issues are: "Increase Access to Nursing, Mental Health, and Social Emotional Learning Staff" and "Prevent and Reduce Gun Violence and Suicide". This coincides with the concerns of many Northshore families as well. The district has mental health supports at every school including staff and curriculum. For example, every elementary school of at least 500 students has a full-time mental health counselor and smaller schools have a half-time counselor. What is the district doing well? What should it be doing to better to support students' mental health and safety?

RESPONSE #4

When it became clear several years ago that the teen suicide rates and mental health crises had been on a steady rise and promised to continue rising, the Northshore School District took action. Initially, of course, and continuously, there has been advocacy at every level of government to increase funding to schools and communities to provide mental health resources that the state simply didn't provide. Northshore was fortunate in that the rates in our community were lower than most in our region, but the district was pro-active, none-the-less, pushing for partnerships with local healthcare providers and grants to pay for the additional resources. Because of this, NSD was ahead of the curve when the pandemic hit and were able to deploy those additional resources. When it became clear just how the pandemic was impacting our students, we preemptively went further and shuffled funds within our budget to do more. It is the continuous 'keep the kids first' approach that helps provide foresight into what needs may arise and what precautions to take, and keeping our finances secure, so that we are better prepared and able to take action when problems arise.

We can, of course, always do better. This next year, in particular, I'd like to see us with even more counselors and nurses, regular training for the staff to better recognize when their students are in need and how to approach that. We should be providing students with the knowledge of how to recognize crisis in themselves and their peers and a reliable path to seek assistance. I think it critical that every student have a trusted adult that they can reach out to at any time and for the district to provide those mentors with the time and resources needed to establish that trusting relationship.

QUESTION #5

Funding is basically fixed and so new spending in one area means making cuts somewhere else.

Some of the things that Northshore has chosen to spend their money on are: the 7-period day for high school, and staffing for nurses & counselors beyond what the state provides. Where do you think we need to spend more of our resources and where would you cut spending to make it work budget-wise?

RESPONSE #5

The baseline for me in a question like this is—what resources could we use to increase equity and make progress toward the individualized education all of our students deserve? And, if the state doesn't fund it (or mandates it without funding)—Where can we shift resources without impacting educational quality and equity? With respect to where I would like to see us spend more resources, early childhood education and daycare is up there, as is additional counseling resources and mentoring services for students who are struggling. I would put additional resources into inclusivity—training and facilities, as well as taking a hard look at where we need to ensure that all schools are brought up to speed, so students have equitable access to the same programs. I have a lengthy list..... With respect to what I would cut to make these work, the bottom line is, first, don't negatively impact our students or introduce an equity barrier. Without having specific line items, it is difficult to be specific about where to shuffle. But, e.g., if we want to add additional staff, I would look for areas where perhaps we could shift a replacement hire or combine some staff functions for already well represented programs, to free up some FTE. All of which, of course, needs to include the input and collaboration of our teachers/staff, who know best how to provide for our students. We could look for programs that would otherwise be scheduled for expansion—to perhaps delay additional dollars in one, to provide for programs that would more equitably serve more students. That's vague, I know, but you can't call out a program until the data and proposals are in front of you.

QUESTION #6

What is a school board member's role and responsibility under the law and under Policy Governance? How does that role differ from the role of the superintendent or the administration?

RESPONSE #6

Well, it seems a bit mundane, but we (both board and superintendent) must first and always abide by the law (and state constitution) and make sure the letter and intent of both law and guidance from the legislature and OSPI is carried out. So, we need to be familiar, not only with district policy and function, but also with any bill or guidance handed down that impacts any aspect of education, as well as how the district is run. It is the board's responsibility to hire and direct the superintendent, providing her with the parameters within which she must operate and setting our expectations for the outcome of student, school and district performance. This is Policy Governance. The superintendent, a highly educated and experienced educational professional, directs the administration and is responsible for all day-to-day operations of the school district and how the district meets those parameters and expectations. The school board is comprised of community volunteers. The current board is highly educated and experienced in education, but community volunteers, none-the-less, and cannot be involved in the daily activities of 33 schools and thousands of staff. Policy Governance allows that the community (board) hires the best they can to run the district and oversees the performance based on community values and needs, via regular reports and updates.

QUESTION #7

Within our school district, there is a lot of residential building. Overcrowding is a major issue in many of our schools as well as portables and buildings that are old and need maintenance. What are the steps you would suggest the district take to alleviate these issues?

RESPONSE #7

I think this necessarily boils down to community support of a bond issue. We need to (and are) have an assessment of every school to determine what is feasible with respect to modification or addition (including up, since buildable land is becoming scarce), then identify the highest priority schools and conditions to address. We must take advantage of any funding opportunities that are available through the state or grants, but we need to get feedback from the community and the students who attend the schools about what they need and present the cost of construction with alternatives. For me, eliminating the need for classroom portables is a high priority, and always looking for opportunities to add space with resources we already have, such as when ILHS was purchased and remodeled to ease some of the burden from our high schools.



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