



MICHAEL ALBRECHT

Northshore School District No. 417
Director District No. 1

Email: michael@michael4kids.com

Website: michael4kids.com

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

I am proud to say that I have spent 14 years in the Northshore school district as a student. During this time I consciously dove into the issues that so many NSD students and parents face. Through my 14 years in the district, I participated in various youth organizations, specifically in leadership roles. Whether involved in student government, academic achievement organizations, or with the Boy Scouts of America, I have cultivated valuable tools that have shaped who I am as an adult. After graduation, I have continued to stay involved in organizations that benefit our youth, such as the Northwest Sarcoma Foundation. In recognition of my accomplishments in leadership positions in and out of Northshore, I earned the U.S. Department of Education's U.S. Presidential Scholar Award. This prestigious award allowed me to meet with government officials and academics to discuss the work that must be done to provide for the students of Northshore.

Because of all of the work I have done for the community, I continue to receive plaudits from educators, nurses, counselors, a former Northshore school board member, and those in district administration. I know that a key principle of leadership is listening to others' concerns and asking the right questions. True problem-solving comes when we work together and communicate effectively. My experiences in Northshore and beyond have equipped me with this skill set. I look forward to serving you as a Board member of the District, where I will implement what I have learned and continue to learn along the journey with you as we collectively solve the challenges.

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

Our lives are enriched through diversity of all types. Diversity also includes Special Needs. A close family member and my best friend who has autism, have been recipients of the NSD special education curriculum. I, too, required 504 accommodations after I was first diagnosed with cancer and undergoing treatment. These programs impact not only the special needs child, but also all those around them. As a result, we must focus on advancing these services.

As we have seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, students in special education have been one of the groups most adversely impacted by the Northshore School District's failure to reopen our schools fully. Back in June 2020 (and then updated in September 2020), the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction issued guidance urging school districts to reopen schools for those with special needs and to provide these students with before and after school programs. The school board did not act for months. This inaction is unacceptable. These students were counting on us and families of special needs students were disproportionately disadvantaged by school closures.

I would have followed the health guidelines in opening schools for these students to receive the care they so desperately needed. Witnessing this travesty for our students, I conducted an unofficial poll of hundreds of high school students. 78% reported mental distress, such as depression or high anxiety, due to attending school online. The sad realization is that while the District was promoting 'no suicides,' as a barometer of success, the growing mental health crisis was staring them in the face. We cannot wait for fatalities to determine needs. We cannot wait for OSPI to demand we serve the children. As a future Board Member, I commit to championing the rights of our students, especially those with disabilities.

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 would you approach it as a school board director?

RESPONSE #3

Cultural diversity includes a myriad of aspects including a student's background and thoughts. To provide a truly inclusive environment, we must ensure all our curricula are tailored to the unique aspects of our children. When considering any policy that affects our district's educational standards, I will ensure that it is evidence-based.

An example of a failing curriculum that does not address diversity of needs is our current literacy program. It has been taken off the recommended curriculum list in several states for its outdated approach to learning. Even a sitting board member acknowledged that it's failing. Switching to a science-based, structured literacy program will help students with dyslexia improve, just as it will help advanced students and those who are learning English as a second language. An evidence-supported curriculum helps address all students because it is demonstrably effective.

Another concern of mine when addressing current and future policy is to address age-appropriateness. As a gay man, I believe all students should have pride in themselves and their education. However, protecting the social-emotional well-being of a child should be paramount. Too much specificity in subjects not appropriate to an elementary-aged classroom is unacceptable. We must preserve the innocence of our youngest learners while not alienating anyone that appears 'different', regardless of what those differences might be.

To fully live through the promises of Building Block 1, I will ensure that our education system addresses all students while ensuring that it is backed in evidence and is appropriate for the target audience. By deploying a curriculum that is tailored to individual needs, we can come closer to meeting our shared goals.

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

I am a staunch advocate for mental health awareness. I was the first recipient of the Sohin Mehta Memorial Award, an honor granted in memory of a Northshore student who took his own life and presented to the student who exemplifies positivity and advocacy of mental health. I take mental health issues very personally and extremely seriously. Also close to home, my mother is a former nurse from the Northshore School District and has shared with me some of the challenges she faced. In particular, navigating through the volume and complexity of student physical and emotional needs, especially in large schools. Limited resources made it difficult to provide what she wanted to for each child in need. Our district has come a long way, but we are still far from where we need to be, especially in light of the past year.

To its credit, the district partnered with a number of organizations to try and reduce mental anguish before and during the pandemic, such as the Northshore Human Services Consortium, Northshore YMCA, and the Northshore Community Church. This is good news, as the health and safety of our youth come first. Unfortunately, there are areas where the district falls short.

As previously discussed, 78% of students reported mental health issues as a result of attending school online. Furthermore, King County reported a 30% increase in youth suicides over the last year. Therefore it can be concluded that the strides the district has made in mental health support are not sufficient in combating our growing mental health crisis.

The district made gains in staffing more mental health counselors, but I would like to see a full-time mental health counselor in all of Northshore's 20 elementary schools, six middle schools, four high schools, and five choice schools. Under my plan, these counselors will be in charge of an expanded K-12 mental health curriculum. This will help give children the tools necessary to seek help before their challenges become worse.

Finally, outreach is one of the most essential aspects of advocating. As Superintendent Reid has pointed out in a May 2021 Board meeting, mental health resources are useless if students and parents are not aware of them. I will work to make sure that district programs are much more accessible and easily navigated by all.

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

Northshore is one of the most well-funded public school districts in the state. We need to operate within that budget and not continue to place an increasing burden on our taxpayers by continuously raising bonds and levies, especially post-pandemic when so many families have struggled and also have fixed incomes.

I will share some examples of how the current Board has approved budget spending that is not well thought out, focused on luxury items, and was lacking in transparency:

The funding of the seven-period school day was not well thought out. It has proven to be an unnecessary expense. Six periods are sufficient to complete the Core 24 high school graduation requirement, and the demand has been insufficient to require all students to take the seventh period. We need to focus spending where we get the greatest educational value.

Furthermore, there has been a push to build a luxury, state-of-the-art swimming pool, even though it will not be available for public use, not even in the summer. This kind of continued luxury spending should not be approved until our current infrastructure is where it needs to be. Case in point: our district has 18 schools rated in "poor" repair conditions or "in need" of repair. Therefore, maintaining our assets already invested in will remain a top priority throughout my time in office.

Finally, if the voters agree to renew the capital bond and tax levy, the budgets must align with the promises made in the ballot statement. In 2018, the voters of Northshore graciously passed a \$61M "technology levy." What the voters did not know at the time is that only approximately 3% of funds raised from the levy were to be spent on student devices. As a result of the under-allocation for devices, many student devices were out of warranty, resulting in device malfunctions during the pandemic. This is something the district has apologized for. As we look towards the future, we must develop a more detailed budget that is readily accessible to all voters so that we can develop transparency and trust.

Right now gaining information is next to impossible and distrust is understandably widespread. Neighboring districts have websites that have much easier access to details and reporting. We can do much better.

As your future school board director, I will ensure that your tax dollars are spent wisely with a focus on regaining your trust through transparency.

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

Even before I decided to run for the school board, I purchased a book on meeting procedures and read up on Northshore's governing system, also known as Policy Governance. I did this because I wanted to better understand the board members' responsibilities. As stated by the district, "excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom." Through all of my research on district policy, I have come to the same conclusion. Board members are responsible to their constituents and hold much power, as they work directly with the superintendent. From approving the budget to establishing programs and evaluating the superintendent, the school board impacts everyone in the district. School board members can introduce four different types of policies: goals, superintendent parameters, board process/structure, and superintendent/board roles. So even though a board member does not draft policy in the same way that state legislators might, they still influence the trajectory of the district in a profound manner.

Usually, the policies that the board emphasizes are the goal policies. These proposals are carried out in four steps. First, the goals must be outlined. Second, the board and the superintendent work together to figure out how to implement these goals. Thirdly, the superintendent works to meet these goals through the outlined implementation agreement. Finally, the superintendent reports on the results of her efforts, and the board evaluates them. As someone with solid leadership experience and a love for the district, I view the role as an active collaborator with all stakeholders one, and one that has the opportunity to transform the opportunities for our children.

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

Because we live in a district of nearly 24,000 students, our schools have not been able to keep up with the growth. Portables have been leveraged excessively. Despite new schools being built, this has not addressed the core growth issues. As we move back into an in-person education system, it will be important to reevaluate the numbers. Many students have left the district for private, homeschooling, or moved out of the area. Many have also indicated a preference for online learning. A new baseline at the onset of the school year is imperative as not all this data is yet known. Reforecasting projected growth will be necessary and prioritizing equitable learning environments for our students is essential.

Excessive use of portables in dilapidating schools and access to cutting-edge technology in others is a point of frustration in the district. This is not equity. Building expansions to replace portables must be prioritized.

I understand there are also frustrations about classroom sizes and that teachers cannot reasonably manage classrooms of over thirty students while maintaining the same level of care for each student. Luckily we have an average class size of 17 students, per the recent Annual Report. Where an imbalance is present we must understand the issues and prioritize remediations.

As your future Board Member, I am prepared to do the hard work to research and evaluate the best options and to allocate the funding necessary to accommodate our growing population in acceptable classrooms. Thank you for your attention to this election - our children deserve better. I promise to do better.



MICHAEL ALBRECHT

Northshore School District No. 417
Director District No. 1

For more information, visit the **King County Elections Page** at <https://info.kingcounty.gov/kcelections/Vote/contests/candidates.aspx?eid=26>

**THIS SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE
FORUM Q&A WAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:**

Northshore Council PTSA 6.10

