



Candidate Questionnaire, Whitewater, WI Municipal Election, April 2, 2019

School Board Candidate: Incumbent - Jim Stewart

Q1. What motivates you to want to become or seek another term as a school board member? Have you visited our schools and met with administrators?

I enjoy being a School Board member and I am seeking reelection to work with the Board on the revision and possible new policies to fit the Strategic Plan, and also assist the Board to remain fiscally responsible with the passage of the Four Year Operational Referendum, both passed November last year.

Much input was received by our community members, staff and students in developing the Strategic Plan. The Plan includes the District: Mission, Vision, Inclusionary Statement, and Strategic Priorities, each with Objectives, Action Steps, and a Five-Year Timeline for implementation. This is the District's Strategic Framework that provides a foundation and a focus for decision making. It also assists in determining where to focus resources in an intentional and cohesive manner. This is good for our District, for our staff, and ultimately good for our students. Districts that have an intentional well-written strategic plan are much more likely to achieve the goals to which they aspire.

Regarding the four year operational referendum which included an additional \$2 million in the 2019-20 school year, \$2.8 million in 2020-21, \$3.6 million in 2021-22 and \$4.4 million by 2022-23. It aims to maintain class sizes; student support and mental health services; comprehensive instructional and co-curricular programs; and technology, safety and facilities infrastructure. In addition the district voters approved a \$23.5 million capital referendum on the Nov. 8, 2016 ballot. The capital referendum allows our teaching staff to implement personalized and flexible ways of delivering education to our students. Also, Safety needs have been a priority of the District with the referenda resources and 2 state safety grants. The second state grant (\$106,000) will have much of the funding geared toward mental health training as well as threat assessment training for our District.

The current Board members are involved, and approach all of the decisions and situations with intellect and regard - the members have a very good mix of ideas, and backgrounds. I have visited all the schools and visited with administrators during my tenure and I'm just glad to be have been part of this functional Board and hope to continue.



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Q2. What is your philosophy on the School Board's role(s) and responsibility(ies) in the Whitewater Unified School District (WWUSD)? What do you think an ideal School Board member does and how should they conduct themselves at meetings?

I have a commitment to the belief that all District students are entitled to have resources available to them to succeed. A board member must also understand that society changes and that these differences require an open mind, and the willingness to be open to change. A good board member must also be able to work collaboratively with the seven member Board. Board members must also have the time to do the key work of the board as it identifies and supports the district's vision standards, assessments, accountability, alignment, continuous improvement, and collaborative partnerships.

Individual members of the School Board have authority only when acting as a Board legally in session, and the Board will not be bound in any way by any action or statement on the part of any individual Board member, except when such statement is made or action is taken pursuant to specific in-structions from the Board. Also, no Board member, by virtue of the office, will exercise any administrative responsibility with respect to the District or, as an individual, command the services of any employee of the District.

The ideal School Board conduct is noted in Board Policy: "School Board members are responsible for the interaction that takes place when they function as members of the team.

- Talk and act respectfully to each other
- Invite and respect individual contributions
- Maintain focus on issues, not individual(s), during conflict
- Do not discount, dismiss, interrupt or name-call"

Q3. What kind of relationship should the school board have with the Whitewater community? How can the school board prove itself accountable to all citizens, especially taxpayers with no children in our public schools?

The District leadership including Board members, have a continue relationship with community members. They are good stewards of the resources the residents provide. More than half the Districts in Wisconsin are in the referendum business to maintain their operational costs to make up for recent decreases in state funding. Since more non-parents are in the community, it



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is evident through many successful referenda since early 1990, that there is support from this non-parent group. The high school, built 25 years ago, was approved with just a positive 26 vote difference. The subsequent referenda won by increasing numbers with the last one in November won by 2012 votes. The accountability is there. It has to be maintained as the board and administration continually provides information to many at meetings, surveys and forums.

These referenda are passing with fewer parents with school age children in the district. The current buzz word is “transparency” in all actions of the board, especially for the non-parent group. In reality, by law and policy, Board actions can only be done at open meetings with no discussion between more than 1 other Board member and any more would be called “rolling quorum” which is unlawful. The Board has an annual meeting with their lawyer on this and other legal matters the Board would be exposed to.

Q4. What experience do you have with complicated budgets and what values would you bring to the budgeting process for funding the WWUSD?

Membership on the School Board and Common Council allowed me to be involved in developing 34 annual budgets in addition to a large UW-W department budget for 20 years and 20 years in the US Army budget system, 2 years in Middleton and 2 years in the state legislature for a total of 78 annual budgets. (I am not 100 years old, several budgets overlapped.)

Yes, understanding the budget systems is a plus, but the second essential element is, “What values do you bring to the budgeting process?” because that is of critical importance. I value public education, I value the students (all students not just those who excel), and I value the “heart” of the District – the teachers, staff and administrators. I value the residents, who provide the resources to make this an excellent district and, most of all, I value the diversity of opportunities the District provides. Budget short-falls notwithstanding, you live with your values.

Q5. What specific actions will you take to increase the role of parents in decision making and promote parental involvement in our schools?

Many actions have been taken by the District the past two years , particularly with the Capital referendum – 2016 and the Operation referendum 2018 by the Leadership Team to meet with school PTA’S, and similar actions for that includes discussion meetings with community groups by District as well as surveys to parents, staff and students. The passing of the passing of the



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Strategic Plan requires the conducting of an annual community, family and staff stakeholder survey. Resulting data will be analyzed at a district level and utilized to inform district goals and practices.

Q6. Describe your experience with conflict resolution with in business setting.

Sounds like a job interview question, Short story – I had a bad experience working for an individual who could not make a decision without changing his mind several times creating time delays and much dissension within the business. I met with his closest friend, explained the situation, and asked him to reach out to hid friend with me. I believe this is called triadic confrontation when there is a third party involved. The three of us met. It turned out that the individual had a hang up on accepting responsibility. I suggested that we could do team decision making and I would ultimate responsibility. I did work out well – a different approach.

Q7. What do you think are the most important issues for the school board to address in the next two years?

The District is not unique in being asked to do more with less. The first challenge is in doing more with less in the area of Special Education. For the past ten years the state support for Special Ed has been frozen at the same amount but the costs in this area continue to rise. This year it is \$1.26 million dollars for District Special WITH STATE SUPPORT AT 24.5% or \$309,042 and this requires District to fund \$950,958 from Educational funds (Fund 10).

The passage of the District Strategic plan in November will require a commitment to revise current Board policies or new policies. This is a time consuming activity.

Another issue is the continuation of the District support in the area of Mental Health, a relative new and important District action.

Q8. What strengths will you bring to the school board in order to accomplish the issues of importance you identified in Question 7?

In the area of Special Ed support, I was a member this of the WI Association of School Board (WASB) Policies and Resolutions Committee for 2019 and was part of a group of 32 selected Board members state wide to present resolutions to the 421 Board representatives at the WASB Annual Convention. The resolutions were discussed in detail and formulated in action resolutions for the Association members and lobbyists to work with the Legislature and the



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Governor' Office on Board issues. I mentioned this because the Special Ed resolution requiring 90% support was discussed in detail at the Committee meetings in summer and fall and during the Convention. The 90% support resolution passed. The School Board met with area legislature and discussed this and other resolutions that impacted the District. This will continue even after the State Budget passes it is going to be hotly discussed in Madison and probably will be less than 90%.

The Governor's budget:

"Special Education

- Increases special education aid by \$75 million in 2019-20 and \$531 million in 2020-21 to reimburse eligible special education costs at 30 percent in 2019-20 and 60 percent in 2020-21.

- Increases the reimbursement rate for high-cost special education (costs over \$30,000 per student) from 90 percent to 100 percent and converts high-cost special education aid from a sum certain to a sum sufficient appropriation (to ensure this aid will not be prorated).

Increases funding for special education transition readiness grants by \$3.5 million in each year."

Having been involved in the development of many policies during my tenure on the Board this experience will help in working with policies supporting the Strategic Plan.

In the area of mental health the resolution asking for legislation to allow districts to exceed revenue limits for mental health services by creating a new fund was a WASB resolution. This will be in the state budget with positive interest noted by legislators. The direction of support is unknown but lobbying will continue.

The Governor's budget:

Student Mental Health

Increases funding by more than \$63 million to boost access to mental health services for school-age youth as follows: \$22 million in each year to expand the mental health categorical aid program to include reimbursement for expenditures for any school-based pupil services in schools;



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\$7 million in each year to increase the number of school-based mental health collaboration grants provided; and

\$2.6 million in each year to expand training for school personnel in various mental health interventions.

Q9. Part-time teaching positions lead to high teacher turn over, which distracts from the continuity of the educational experience. What would you recommend for increasing the number of full-time teaching positions?

This is a budget issue and creating a full time position maybe costly and not necessary if the need is not supported, however it does not appear to be a concern in our District. We have 151 teachers and also 19 Special Ed teachers full time. Of 5 part-time teachers: 1 is Special Ed; 1 is Physical Education, 1 is Counselor and these 3 are under consideration to be full-time next year. Two remaining part-time teachers are in reading and math interventionist.

Q10. What can be done to attract and retain high-quality teachers, administrators, and School Board members that will more closely represent the Whitewater School District population and our diversity? How should their performance be measured?

I have had the pleasure of escorting new teachers and administrators around the community each August for the last 30 years. Three or 4 new staff would make the statement of high housing costs in Whitewater compared to other area communities. Have a welcoming community with good housing, schools and recently added a grocery store. The community must be a good fit for the family. The new UW-W staff have similar comments.

Regarding teacher evaluation; since October 2013-August 2014, the District has been using the Educator Effectiveness System. So have all districts in the state. The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System is a performance-based continuous improvement system designed to improve the education of all students in the state of Wisconsin by supporting guided, individualized, self-determined professional growth and development of educators.

For more: <https://dpi.wi.gov/ee>