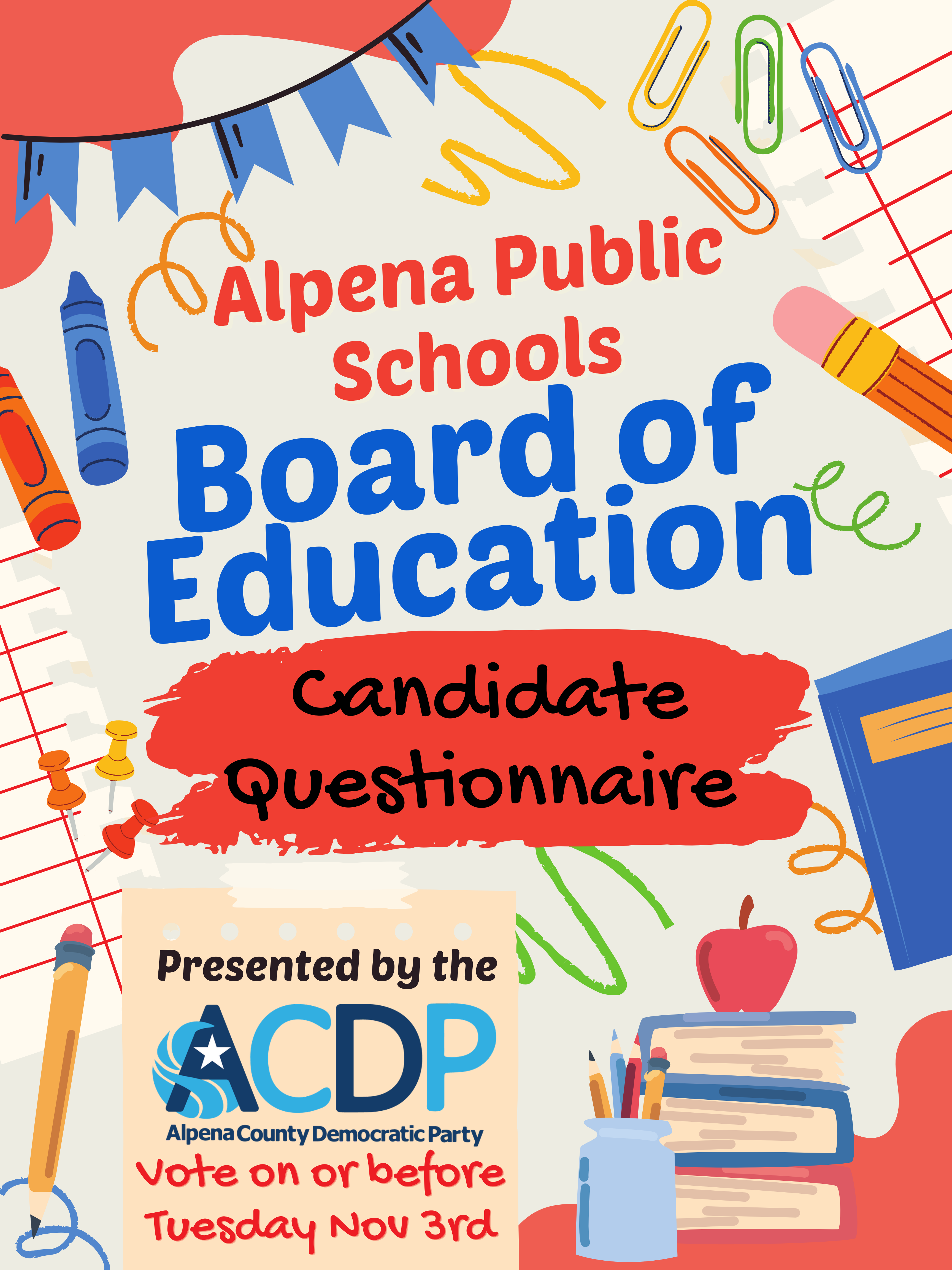




Alpena Public Schools Board of Education

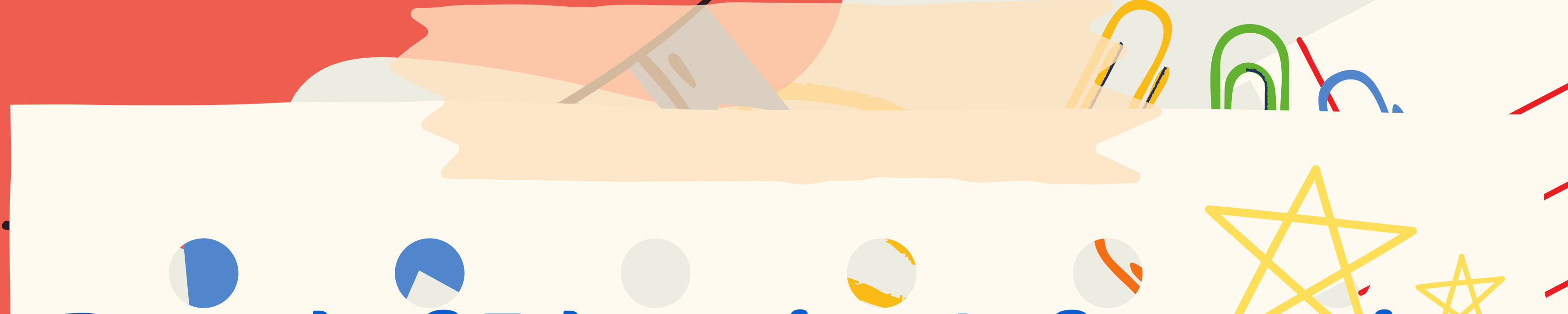
Candidate Questionnaire

Presented by the



Alpena County Democratic Party

Vote on or before
Tuesday Nov 3rd



Board of Education Information

What is the role of the APS Board of Education?

FROM THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS:

- Recruits, hires and evaluates the performance of the superintendent.
- Establishes policy for the district and shares in policy development.
- The district vision is translated into long and short-term goals. The board establishes the structure to accomplish the vision, and periodically evaluates the results.
- Reviews and adopts the budget submitted by the superintendent and aligns the funding priorities with the district goals.
- Approves recommended curriculum and texts based on standards, goals and policies established by the board. Review and evaluate curriculum as it relates to student assessment results.
- Adopts policies governing salaries and salary schedules, terms and conditions of employment, fringe benefits, leave and professional development and employee evaluations.
- Determines school facility needs and communicates proposed construction plans to the community.
- Adopts policies governing school-community relations, advocates for the public school system and remains responsive to community ideas and needs.
- Evaluates the performance of the board and provides feedback for personal leadership development.

How long are APS BOE terms? How many seats are there?

Four years, no term limits. There are 7 total board seats, with 4 on the ballot this election. You may vote for 4 of the 8 candidates on your ballot for this race.

Why isn't the ACDP endorsing candidates for BOE?

Local School Board elections in Michigan are nonpartisan by design. We feel it would be inappropriate to endorse candidates in this race as board members' obligation should be to students, staff, and the community— not political parties or agendas.

In the interest of voter education, we reached out to each candidate to request they complete a short, standardized questionnaire. Their complete responses are provided for each voter's consideration.



Robert Bruning

Response:

No response received after multiple outreach attempts.



Evan Carlson

What specific steps would you support as a school board member to recruit and retain quality teachers, improve working conditions, and ensure teachers have the resources and support they need to be successful?

The APS School Board should create an incentive structure to recruit and retain new teachers in our school system. The APS School Board should instruct the Human Resources Department to actively recruit high quality graduates from Education Colleges that are housed within state universities to come and teach in Alpena. Our board should also focus on retaining veteran teachers with years of experience. Retention of veteran teachers is critical. Educators with years of experience stabilize buildings and provide a wealth of knowledge to their colleagues. The APS School Board should review the incentive structure to increase retention of experienced educators.

One practical improvement that APS can make to improve their working conditions includes paying out accumulated sick days for retiring teachers and providing a bonus to teachers with accumulated days. This would result in less substitutes in classrooms and less teachers losing their planning hours because of mandated class coverage. If there is a shortage of substitute teachers, central office staff and administrators should be pulled to cover classes or APS should internally hire building subs. Best practices for the APS Board of Education should include no bargaining unit working without a contract. The APS Board of Education must conduct contract negotiations in a fair and timely manner. This would improve working conditions and morale for all bargaining units.

Ensuring the success of teachers is something that is overlooked, we expect teachers to do more with less every year. We have a generous community that supports teachers, but the Board of Education should be taking further steps to allocate money for critical classroom supplies so they do not have to come out of the pockets of parents or professional educators.

The board can and should actively support recruiting top talent from all Michigan education colleges and provide an incentive structure for new teachers if they successfully complete 5 years of teaching at Alpena Public Schools.



Evan Carlson

What should be the role of the APS Board of Education in determining and overseeing curriculum, and what standards should the district use to ensure that students receive a high-quality, academically rigorous education that prepares them for college, careers, and life beyond high school?

The role of the APS Board of Education should be to review the proposed changes in curriculum and determine if the recommendation by the curriculum director is appropriate. The bottom line is that APS must follow state education standards. The APS Board of Education is the voice of the public and its job is to evaluate the superintendent, pass a budget and adopt policy which includes oversight of curriculum and its implementation.

The best way to ensure kids receive a high quality education is to hold them accountable. Students that have not or refuse to participate in coursework should be retained and not allowed to progress to the next grade. Allowing students that have demonstrated mastery in any subject to advance is a disservice to the student, their parents, their teachers and APS. Alpena High School currently has a credit system and students must earn enough credits in required subjects to graduate. The same should be true for Thunder Bay Junior High. I believe there should be a credit framework that students must follow to advance to Alpena High School. Above all, the Board of Education should support educators when they recommend that students be retained in their current grade and stand by teachers when their final grades are posted.

If a student is demonstrating that they need to be retained for educational purposes their parents should immediately be notified. Further, each student that has failed a class or is being retained should be evaluated for supplemental educational services that can be provided by the school district. Families deserve the extra time and resources that it takes to ensure that their child sufficiently meets requirements to advance grades (or in specific classes) without failing students upwards.



Evan Carlson

What is your position on how Alpena Public Schools should handle bathroom access for students, and what factors should the Board consider when balancing student privacy, safety, dignity, and the rights of all students?

Bathroom access for students is a health issue. All people face different needs regarding their use of a restroom. Ideally, secondary students should use the restroom before school, during passing time, or during lunch. Secondary school students should have bathroom privileges until they prove that they cannot be trusted to use those facilities appropriately. I trust that building administrators and teachers know how to best handle those situations. It is the duty of the APS Board of Education to limit legal liability regarding any policy, but specifically bathroom policies.

Alpena Public Schools has faced challenges with school transportation, including bus availability, staffing, reliability, and costs. What should the district do to ensure students have safe, reliable, and timely transportation, and what would you prioritize when making decisions about transportation funding and staffing?

Alpena Public Schools face many barriers providing school transportation. Chief among them is the huge size of the district, which is over 600 square miles. Other barriers to the APS transportation strategy are staffing, fluctuating costs. Approximately 7-8% of the annual budget for APS is used on transportation. Many other districts only require 1% of their annual budget to be appropriated towards transportation. One thing that will not change is the size of APS. Our school district will always be large and have large overhead operating costs. So, we should focus on what we can control, which is filling all vacant bus garage positions with quality individuals. Full staffing is crucial to the smooth operation of APS transportation needs. A full staff that is paid quality wages could help relieve the current uncertainty families face when a bus route is cancelled due to staff issues. It is critical that APS families have access to safe, reliable and timely transportation.



Evan Carlson

What personal or professional experience have you had that you believe has prepared you to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education, and how would that experience shape the decisions you make on behalf of students, families, teachers, and staff?

My experience with Alpena Public Schools is personal. I am a proud graduate of the Alpena High School Class of 2021. My mother has taught her entire career at Thunder Bay Junior High. My Uncle Jason is a retired teacher and former head football coach from Alpena Public Schools. My Aunt Laura has coached numerous sports for Alpena Public School and has been in the education field for years. My entire life I have been exposed to the life of a two teacher household and have been surrounded by public school teachers. I know their pain, their fears, their frustrations, their hopes and their desire to have a positive impact on Alpena's children. Alpena Public Schools is deeply personal to me and my whole family, which gives me a unique perspective on how to improve our school district.

Professionally, I have had many great experiences that have prepared me to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education. I graduated from Central Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science in 2024. During my time at CMU I had the opportunity to engage in courses specifically: "State and Local Government, Michigan Law and Policy, Communication in Leadership, and American Legislative Process." These classes directly prepared me to serve as a member of the Alpena Public School Board of Education by building my knowledge of public budgeting, mastering the legislative process, enhancing my communication and leadership skills and building my knowledge of state law and policy.

While earning my degree I had the opportunity to engage in professional internships. First, the Executive Office of the Governor of Michigan as a Scheduling and Advance Intern. Second, with the U.S. House of Representatives, specifically with the Office of Congressman Dan Kildee as a Legislative and Press Intern. Both experiences were professional and operated in an official government office in a nonpartisan matter. These experiences have prepared me to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education and conduct official business in a nonpartisan and responsible manner.

Prior to obtaining my current position I was a substitute teacher at Thunder Bay Junior High. Substitute teaching gave me perspective on what our teachers and school staff do every day. I will never forget my substitute teaching experience and what it took to be successful as a sub-let alone what a full time staff member commits to their students. Currently, I work as a Juvenile Probation Officer with the 53rd Circuit Court – Family Division in Presque Isle County. I work with youth involved in the juvenile court system every day. Working with juveniles is incredibly rewarding. It brings my attention to the lack of resources in Northern Michigan to help students and families succeed.



Incumbent

Sarah Fritz

What specific steps would you support as a school board member to recruit and retain quality teachers, improve working conditions, and ensure teachers have the resources and support they need to be successful?

The implementation of the Rehmann Employee Survey which gave the school administration, superintendent, and board members feedback from the teachers and support staff on what is good about our school system and where we need to improve. Annually review Rehmann survey results to track progress and identify emerging staff needs. Supported the implementation of the district's Strategic Plan which promotes attracting, recruiting, retaining, and developing high quality staff. I support our Human Resources Staff in their professional position for recruiting and retaining the staff. The HR staff have developed and implemented a comprehensive multi-year induction and mentorship plan. The HR department provides a semi-annual report to the board detailing retention rates and program feedback.

What should be the role of the APS Board of Education in determining and overseeing curriculum, and what standards should the district use to ensure that students receive a high-quality, academically rigorous education that prepares them for college, careers, and life beyond high school?

The role of an APS school board member is to approve, on the recommendation of the PK-12 Academic Programs and Accountability Director and a committee composed of teachers and administration, the curriculum the group has chosen. The committee has done extensive research on the different curriculums offered for their consideration. They then recommend the appropriate one that meets the needs of our students and the teachers and the Michigan State Standards. A board member may sit in on the committee meetings which I have done for the K-5 and 6-12 Mathematics and the K-5 English Language Arts.



Incumbent

Sarah Fritz

What is your position on how Alpena Public Schools should handle bathroom access for students, and what factors should the Board consider when balancing student privacy, safety, dignity, and the rights of all students?

My position on bathroom access for students is that there are single use restrooms in both the high school and the junior high. This procedure and accommodations have been adequate in the schools.

Alpena Public Schools has faced challenges with school transportation, including bus availability, staffing, reliability, and costs. What should the district do to ensure students have safe, reliable, and timely transportation, and what would you prioritize when making decisions about transportation funding and staffing?

The challenges that Alpena Public Schools are facing in transportation are not unique to our district. Our district spans 604 square miles and the transportation budget is 2.5 million. The district is currently working with Kingscott on transportation and other concerns as the district moves forward into the future. This is all part of the Strategic Plan which can be found in more detail on the APS web page.

What personal or professional experience have you had that you believe has prepared you to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education, and how would that experience shape the decisions you make on behalf of students, families, teachers, and staff?

I am currently in my 4th year as a school board member. I am a former educator of 20 years with 17 of those years in public education. I support the Strategic Plan to ensure long-term sustainability and student success. I will continue my support of the teachers, staff, and the community by being present at school programs and activities. My consistent attendance at workshops and board meetings will continue and I will expand my education on school board related matters through the MASB organization.



Claire Kipfmiller

What specific steps would you support as a school board member to recruit and retain quality teachers, improve working conditions, and ensure teachers have the resources and support they need to be successful?

To ensure teacher support, I would like to increase supply budgets so teachers are not spending their own money on classroom items. I would also like to give competitive pay including raises and possible sign-on bonuses for in-demand subjects. I would also make sure teachers have support, for new teachers implementing a support system or mentorship program would show new teachers in our district that we support long term teachers right from the beginning, and for returning teachers we need to keep non-teaching jobs to a minimum to help them focus on lesson planning and student engagement.

What should be the role of the APS Board of Education in determining and overseeing curriculum, and what standards should the district use to ensure that students receive a high-quality, academically rigorous education that prepares them for college, careers, and life beyond high school?

To determine and oversee curriculum, student, teacher and staff data is crucial. To obtain this data, I think it's important to set short-term goals throughout the year. We can learn a lot about how the school is operating, what's working and what isn't in a short amount of time. Student and teacher feedback is also essential to help determine goals and what success looks like. I think the best way to help our schools prepare students for college, careers, and life after is community engagement. Getting a diverse group onto the board and then continual engagement will help us lead our children in the right direction.



Claire Kipfmiller

What is your position on how Alpena Public Schools should handle bathroom access for students, and what factors should the Board consider when balancing student privacy, safety, dignity, and the rights of all students?

Students should feel safe when using any school facility. For most this looks like a standard stall style room with sturdy partitions with fully closing doors and for others this looks like a single occupancy room. The Board should consider all issues that come with using a bathroom, including but not limited to disability or injury, body issues such as a period, IBS, or Crohn's; bullying; general discomfort because using a toilet is a private matter.

Alpena Public Schools has faced challenges with school transportation, including bus availability, staffing, reliability, and costs. What should the district do to ensure students have safe, reliable, and timely transportation, and what would you prioritize when making decisions about transportation funding and staffing?

Transportation is hard, we live in a diverse climate and a large district to cover. We are currently utilizing the Hub-and-Spoke method and I think pairing that with community help to carpool kids to a main road for time and safety may help retain bus drivers who have concerns on our winter roads. We are also about 15% below national average for paying our drivers, looking into funding and budgets will be a great start to show our drivers we prioritize them.



Claire Kipfmiller

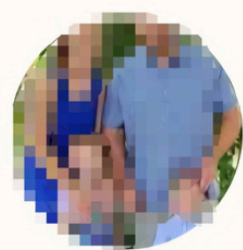
What personal or professional experience have you had that you believe has prepared you to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education, and how would that experience shape the decisions you make on behalf of students, families, teachers, and staff?

I graduated from a public school in Wisconsin that really helped shape my immediate life post school. I was involved in a work program that helped me decide on a career. I then attended a Massage Therapy Academy and received my degree which also included business classes. From there I worked in a lot of different industries, learning all sorts of trade skills and public relations. I moved back to Alpena in 2014 and met my now husband. Together we opened Zen Fitness and The Elixir Bar all while starting our family. We have 2 daughters just beginning their school careers and I try to be as much of an active participant in their school lives as possible. Being a mother was an important starting point to me wanting to join the board, but I've always had a strong interest in community involvement. At Zen, we strive to help our community members by hosting our financially aiding fundraisers. Everyday I talk with people from all walks of life, I love finding our commonalities and celebrating our differences. I think I will help the board make better decisions for our community because I believe in communication and including everyone in the discussions that affect our children. I want to help bring Alpena and our surrounding communities closer together and I want to help our children live amazing lives and I believe that starts by the choices the school board makes.



Lindsey Klein

Response:



Lindsey Klein Sep 7

to me ▾



Hello Sara,
It's come to my attention that you have already chosen and put up signs for the 4 candidates you support, according to reports from members of our community. I wish I had been given the chance to truly be considered before a decision has already been made.
I decline to answer at this point.



Alpena Count... Sep 7

to Lindsey ▾



Hey Lindsey,

It's a bit odd that people are reporting on the signs in front of my house as if that means anything to their daily life, but ah well.

The signs in front of my house also have nothing to do with this questionnaire. The responses are not going just to me. Instead this is meant to be shared with all of our supporters and the community. We want everyone to get to know all candidates so voters can make an informed decision.

Although my personal decision has been made, many in the community have not made their decision. Your answer is disappointing but we will proceed with your response.



Incumbent

AJ MacArthur

Response:



MacArthur, A... Sep 4
to me ▾



Thank you for this opportunity, but I must respectfully decline.
A.J.



Kayla Ratz

What specific steps would you support as a school board member to recruit and retain quality teachers, improve working conditions, and ensure teachers have the resources and support they need to be successful?

After speaking to multiple teachers in the area, I know that teachers do not feel supported by the current board. This is a huge failure on the board's part. Our teachers, at the time I am writing this, do not have a contract. Because of this, their paychecks do not reflect the pay raise they are supposed to receive each year they stick with APS. Their insurance deductible offered through the school has gone up 26%. 26%! You guys, how can we expect to keep qualified and caring teachers when we can't even give them insurance that allows them to go to the doctor when they are sick? My first suggestion to solving this problem? Stop denying grant money that would pay for things that come, instead, from tax payer dollars.

Beyond just paying them properly, my sincere belief and platform I am running on is that the villainization of teachers needs to stop. Teachers are our neighbors, friends and family. They have dedicated their lives to the education and personal growth of our children. To throw out words like "indoctrination" when talking about people who spend so much of their lives genuinely trying to make a positive impact in the world is hurtful to the image of public schooling. If we have board members who do not think the public school is the best route for their own children, then maybe they need to be replaced with people who believe in the system that is public schooling.



Kayla Ratz

What should be the role of the APS Board of Education in determining and overseeing curriculum, and what standards should the district use to ensure that students receive a high-quality, academically rigorous education that prepares them for college, careers, and life beyond high school?

Let us, as a board, listen to what the experts have to say. Those experts are the teachers who are in the classroom day in and day out. As someone who is not in the classroom, pretending I am any sort of expert on which curriculum works well would be fake. I believe that we take the state standards and combine them with the opinions of teachers, and as long as there is nothing crazy in it, we support the curriculum they see as the best fit.

What is your position on how Alpena Public Schools should handle bathroom access for students, and what factors should the Board consider when balancing student privacy, safety, dignity, and the rights of all students?

I almost feel silly giving this question any attention. We just have so many bigger fish to fry. Our students have come forward and said there is no bathroom problem. Our teachers have come forward to say there is no bathroom problem. Trying to put in place a bathroom policy, to me, targets students in a way I will not participate in. I will not, as an adult, attempt to target or bully a minor and adults on the board should look inward to see why targeting kids we don't understand and have a hard go of it to begin with is something on our agenda.



Kayla Ratz

Alpena Public Schools has faced challenges with school transportation, including bus availability, staffing, reliability, and costs. What should the district do to ensure students have safe, reliable, and timely transportation, and what would you prioritize when making decisions about transportation funding and staffing?

As a parent who has felt the effects of this issue, I can confirm that this is an actual issue. Getting children safely to and from school should be a huge priority. I especially see how this is a bigger problem in rural areas where walking to school is simply not an option. Parents finding out their child's bus will not be running sometimes have to do creative backbends to ensure their children get to school. I do believe this is something public schools should be able to confidently offer. We, as a school system, need to reach out to the community to attain more substitute bus drivers. Could we do this by connecting with local construction companies who have qualified drivers but do not work in the summer? Could we offer to pay for CDL classes to get drivers ready? I would really need to investigate the budget further but I do recognize this is an issue we have as a school system.



Kayla Ratz

What personal or professional experience have you had that you believe has prepared you to serve on the Alpena Public Schools Board of Education, and how would that experience shape the decisions you make on behalf of students, families, teachers, and staff?

My experience in life involves, firstly, quite a bit of customer service. I have had a job that involves serving the public for the majority of my life. Anyone who has spent any amount of time in customer service knows the job requires good communication skills, not only with your coworkers, but with customers as well. With that being said, it is common to have to apply the communication and negotiation skills to people who may not share your viewpoints. I think my willingness to compromise or simply speak and share my views without coming across as rude or dismissive is something I have mastered.

On a side note, I have worked for many different summer camps as a counselor, coached T-ball, and worked in a Junior High after school program in Kalamazoo. I have worked in the shadows of people who were very qualified to work with children and it has had an impact on my life that I find very significant. I try to volunteer as much of my own time to my own children's school. My passion for helping the school out in that way could really be helpful in the position as a board member. School staff always enjoy when board members show up. Showing up is something I can do.



Vincent Thomas

Response:

No response received after
multiple outreach attempts.