

NCP Questionnaire 2017: Please return by August 14th.

First, please take some time to introduce yourself, your background, and why you have chosen to run for school board at this time. What topics are most important to you, and what are some of your work and volunteer experiences that would be an asset to the board?

I am J.P. Claussen, I am choosing to run for the Board after losing last summer's special election because I felt then, and still feel that it is beneficial to have an educator's voice and ears at the Board table. The Board is very disconnected from how their policies affect the staff who implement them. I was a special education teacher, primarily for students with emotional and behavioral disorders at West High School from 2004 to 2014. In that time I also served as ICEA president, co-chief negotiator of the teacher's Negotiated Agreement for 8 years, 8 years on the Health Insurance Committee and I also served on the Labor Management Team. I currently am on the Advisory Council for the Rape Victim's Advocacy Program (RVAP) and serve as a community member on the Johnson County Juvenile Justice and Youth Development Committee. I am the co-president of the PTO at my daughter's school, Kirkwood Elementary.

BOND: The upcoming bond election is very important to many in the district. The bond language allows for flexibility to re-order projects as the board desires. If the bond passes, will you consider changing the timeline of projects? When it comes to spending bond money, how would you prioritize spending? Please address the following specific areas in your response:

1. academic versus non-academic spending
2. capacity needs
3. art and music rooms

I support moving forward with finishing the projects in the FMP as ordered. I would prioritize capacity first. I think temporary classrooms should be just that, temporary, and, having taught in a Temp at West High, I know there is a disconnect from the larger school community that isn't there when students and teachers are in the buildings. Athletic facilities are not part of capacity, however, I do think there need to be equitable opportunities at each school. I don't think equitable means "exactly the same." I would leave it up to each school community to decide what their needs are. The Board has the power to approve or deny requests, but I will listen closely to building principals, the staff, the students and the families in making decisions about needs for schools. If I absolutely had to have a hard order of priority I would prioritize in this order: capacity, academic needs, equitable facilities.

FMP: The facilities master plan is the guide to the timing of the bond projects. Should the bond fail, how would you re-prioritize the projects to be done in an effort to get to 60%? Specifically:

4. Would you consider revising projects with less demonstrable need and if so, which ones?
5. Do you think projects should be added to increase the odds it will pass next time, and if so, which projects should be added?

If the Bond fails, the first order will be to understand why it failed. In a way the FMP gives something to everyone, some may feel that the current FMP doesn't adequately address their particular needs. Once we begin revising it, then are we just creating a new group who will oppose the next Bond? I don't want to run down that rabbit hole and try and parse out the "winning combination." If we simply add projects, especially with increasing construction costs, then that will add to the overall cost of the Bond, which also may be a hurdle to passage. This is why I support the current Bond, I do think it has the best chance of passing. Depending on the voter decision, my first instinct, should the Bond fail, would be to go back to the public with a much smaller Bond that addresses our most pressing needs. Maybe the community would pony up for a much larger Bond that included many more projects, but conventional wisdom would say if a Bond fails you would not go to the public with a larger Bond.

BOUNDARIES: Many boundary changes have been made in recent years, there was also a lot of discussion and even a group formed (called ESAS: Every Student, Any School) that promoted FRL balance at all of our schools to provide the best academic environment for all of our students regardless of physical address. How should the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education court ruling impact decision making with respect to boundaries in our district? Specifically address the following topics in your response:

6. Do you support a bussing for balance boundary scenario for the secondary schools? Why or why not?
7. Do you support a bussing for balance scenario for the elementary schools, or changing the elementary boundaries to reduce the number of schools with FRL percents of 70% and higher when nearby schools have significantly lower FRL percents? Why or why not?
8. Should cost be a constraining factor on bussing for balance plans?

I am certain most in this group are aware that my campaign last summer revolved around being against the "busing for balance," plan. This plan affects Kirkwood and Alexandar the most, and as a Kirkwood parent I know that this is still a difficult transition for families from my neighborhood. However, at this point I believe we need to see this plan through, and attempt to make it as positive as possible for our students. Especially the students who are being bused in from outside their neighborhoods. They will not have the friendships and

the community connections, so we need to be sure that these new students are welcomed and supported. So, at this stage. I am trying to make the best of this.

I now know from experience how beneficial a diverse experience can be, since I see that as a major strength of Kirkwood Elementary. I know that students in more homogeneous schools are missing out on the experience of diversity that has inherent benefits that won't just magically appear once they get to Junior High and High School. In addition, high FRL rates do come with very real challenges, and having too high, or too low FRL numbers makes for very different educational environments for many reasons. So, it is beneficial if these numbers are evened out. I think that looking at areas where geography would help us balance FRL numbers makes sense and I think the less busing the better. Cost is always a constraining factor in busing, and as a Board member I will be vigilant with the taxpayer's dollars.

**CAPACITY:** The bond does not include building an elementary school in North Coralville that is already named Grant elementary. The 10 year enrollment projections completed in November 2016 did not show any growth in Grant or Coralville Central elementary schools despite multiple new developments in each attendance zone.

9. Why do you think these schools showed no growth in the 10 year enrollment projections?

10. Since there is currently no funding source for these predictable elementary capacity needs, what will your solution be?

First, I do think this is why we need the Bond. We can afford to build some schools without always Bonding for them. We built schools in the past without a GO Bond. However our needs are so great, that I feel passing this Bond will make it easier to free up funds for future needs, such as Grant Elementary. I don't know why they show no growth in those projections, I think they are wrong about that. It could be that if they included it, the current Bond would be quite a bit larger and they were worried about a larger Bond failing. I personally would support a larger Bond if it included all of our needs, but I don't know if 60% of voters would agree with me, my hunch, as mentioned in a previous answer is that if the Bond fails, it is in large part due to the size, though I could be wrong about that. If we continue to see average growth of 300 students a year, we are going to need to keep building schools for those students.

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATION/SECLUSION ROOMS:**

11. What steps would you like to see taken to improve the special education experience students and their parents receive in our district?

12. Do you favor the complete elimination of seclusion rooms, or should they be modified? Please explain your answer.

This is a very complicated answer to an even more complicated problem. Since my masters degree is focused on Behavior Disorders, and I was a teacher for students with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities for 10 years, and as I currently work in the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric unit, where restraint sometimes happens, and happens with great compassion, empathy and professionalism, I know the answers aren't simple.

The truth is we need a big overhaul in Special Education. The State of Iowa Accreditation Report from June of 2016 lays out MANY significant problems with special education. These problems didn't appear in a short time, and they won't be fixed quickly. But we MUST have the will to genuinely fix these glaring issues.

Seclusion "rooms," are a symptom of this. Also, 6'X6' can hardly be called a "room," they are boxes inside of rooms. I do know that as a tool seclusion can be beneficial, but there needs to be constant supervision and as soon as the student has calmed there needs to be immediate intervention. This takes staff and time, but it is the correct way to handle seclusion in my opinion. There are schools and districts who do not use these boxes at all, even with severely behaviorally challenged students. So it is a matter of time, training, and support. In addition there are additional types of interventions that can work to help prevent meltdowns and improve student behavior overall.

This is truly a more complicated issue that can be answered adequately in this format. The committee that was convened to look at this issue was given a report, titled the Hanover Report. If our district were to implement the recommendations in this report, as well as genuinely follow the guidance from the Department of Ed from last summer's Accreditation report then I believe we would be on the right track.

Special ed Report

[http://www.boarddocs.com/ia/iccsd/Board.nsf/files/AAVQZZ6BCE8B/\\$file/IowaCitysitevisitreport%20Redacted%20Version.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/ia/iccsd/Board.nsf/files/AAVQZZ6BCE8B/$file/IowaCitysitevisitreport%20Redacted%20Version.pdf)

Hanover Report

ACADEMIC/NON-ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT:

13. What ideas do you have for improving the academic and social-emotional experiences of all students in this district, especially minority student populations?

14. What should the district and the community be doing to improve the experiences of our teachers and support staff; and to help retain valued minority teachers/staff in particular?

Firstly we need to ensure that we, as a district are willing to commit to this in a genuine way. We have data that would suggest that we have a culture of implicit bias. This would be expected, as our racial history as a state and a country come with a culture of implicit bias. So we need, as a community and a staff, to unpack this. I feel we need robust professional development in the area of implicit bias training.

We also should examine how we as a district and a community contribute to the school to prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects minority youth. I think the more we can utilize a restorative justice model, over a punish and suspend model, we will be moving in the right direction.

One thing the district is piloting at my daughter's school, which is a "majority minority" school, as well as a high FRL school, is the AVID program. This program that builds a culture of college readiness among populations that largely may be potential first generation college students seems to be very effective. My belief is that it is effective because it teaches very specific skills that are beneficial in the world of student readiness. Organization, respect and care for effort and work, a goals oriented approach to learning, etc. While I do not believe every person needs to attend a 4 year Liberal Arts college, I do believe everyone should have the opportunity to succeed if they do choose that path. Expanding AVID is one way we could improve the outcomes for our students.

As to hiring and retaining minority staff, personally I would reach out to minorities who have left to gain an understanding of why, because retention is a big problem. I know from my interactions with many minority youth in my years at West High, that having a teacher who looks like you creates a very powerful impression. I would be excited about trying to recruit more minority University students, or our own minority students into teaching. Once they are here, I would hope we can listen closely to why people decide to stay or leave in order to gauge what the district can do to support more minority teachers and staff deciding to stay here for their careers.

DISTRICT CULTURE: Recent news and department of education reports have identified various issues with the "culture" of our district.

15. Do you feel that parents, students, staff and teachers are comfortable bringing concerns and problems to administrators and the board? What steps could the district/board take to improve its interactions with stakeholders?

16. Do you feel it is a conflict of interest for administrators to be a private consultant outside of our district; does it negatively impact their ability to meet the needs of our district? Explain your response.

I got into this a bit in my answer for the Special Ed question. I do not feel people are comfortable speaking their concerns. I know personally many who are not comfortable, and I feel the tone from the current administration and some board members is one that desires to stifle or ignore questions and dissent. I think one immediate thing we can do, and one thing I try and always do, is to genuinely and actively listen to concerns with a mind to truly understand where the speaker is coming from. People need to feel heard, and the best way to make sure people feel heard, is to actually listen to them. Forming committees with predetermined outcomes is not an effective way to do this. We also need to learn to disagree without resorting to demeaning those we disagree with. Ignoring or stifling dissent is not a wise course, in my opinion, I think it foments more dissent and less compromise.

I am not generally supportive of administrators being private consultants. I think this opens the door to many slippery slopes and potentially creates conflicts of interest. We have to guard against situations similar to that in which the Chicago Public Schools awarded illegally a large contract to a company the CPS Superintendent had worked for previously. Those actors are now incarcerated. I feel we have enough on our plate to have to also worry about potential "you scratch my back, I scratch yours" situations as regards bidding or paying outside consultants. I will also say that I am open minded, and if I was shown evidence that private consulting is helping our students in some way, I could consider it as potentially acceptable, however I have not seen such evidence.

BUDGET: Our district values competitive teacher pay, small class sizes and broad programming. However, state funding in recent years will not allow us to do all three. The district also values keeping small neighborhood schools, yet schools with about 270 students will have average class sizes of about 19 students K-6, while our larger school(s) of 675 or more students will have average class sizes of 32

or more students for grades 3-6 and about 24 students K-2.

17. What ideas do you have to reconcile these three competing needs (teacher pay, class sizes, broad programming)?

18. What suggestions do you have for addressing the inefficiencies of several small schools in our district, especially when low FRL small schools have been reporting smaller class sizes than some higher FRL schools for many years?

I do think we need to be creative with this. One idea is magnets and offering diverse programming, which may allow for parents to choose to send their children to a school other than the closest neighborhood school. At the elementary level this could be offering an attractive program with a lottery system and then if demand warrants it, perhaps we expand a popular program that allows parents to choose a different educational experience for their child. To come up with a solution, I think we are going to have to take some risks, and try new things. Typically, in larger school districts, programs like full-immersion foreign language programs and extremely popular and require a lottery system to be able to attend. If we did this in a neighborhood school with smaller class sizes, would this help balance out those numbers? I am not certain, but typically when you offer an attractive program, parents will choose to move their children out of their own neighborhood. We have to be sensitive that this doesn't push out neighborhood kids, so that if it is your choice you can stay with your neighborhood school. I think our community would be ready for foreign language immersion, fine arts schools and year round schools, at least in some limited capacity.

Another idea to help costs is to have teacher led schools. This is a concept where teachers run a school and there is no administrator. Granted this is a very different model that requires a vast restructuring in how a building operates, but I have read research that suggests when they are done well, with full staff buy in, they can be very effective learning communities. This might help reduce our administrative costs, especially in smaller schools.

At the secondary level I think there are more opportunities to have our students move around the community. Especially for Juniors and Seniors, I would like to see more job shadows, internships, moving to programming offered and different schools etc. It is not uncommon to have students travel to programming. Des Moines has their Central Academy, where students may spend half of their day in their home school, and the other half of their day taking state of the art Vocational Programming or Advanced Placement classes.

I also think we need to have a frank discussion as a Board and a community about how much we are willing to pay for the educational experiences of our students. Perhaps our community is open to more taxation to help alleviate some of these concerns. We do have a relatively low overall property tax rate. We also have high property valuation, so perhaps the community would not support raising more funds for smaller class sizes or to keep smaller schools open. The truth is this is a balancing act, with many different priorities.

The solid fact is we simply can't have it all everywhere. We will absolutely see a thinning out of opportunities and resources. However if we get creative with innovative programming I think these are solvable issues without raising more taxes beyond what we need for infrastructure.

#### ACHIEVEMENT/CURRICULUM:

19. What can the board do to address the achievement gaps?

20. What role should the board have in selecting curriculum? Could curriculum choice help close the achievement gap?

21. The 1:1 chrome book program was recently approved at the high school level by the board, with junior highs becoming 1:1 in 2018-2019. Some parents have mentioned concerns about the likely additional screen time the devices will cause with negative effects on sleep, fear of cost of replacement should it be lost/stolen, and homework due dates/times being outside of regular school hours. Do you see a need to set policy in regard to this program? Should students be able to opt out of getting a device?

We need to maintain our focus on the achievement gap, but we should be sure that we never forget what we are looking for are outcomes. The outcomes aren't test scores, the test scores are one measure toward beneficial outcomes, but not the only one. So whether the achievement gaps close or not, every single child should be given an education that promises them opportunities for positive outcomes at the end of it. Having said that hiring the best teachers, listening to them and focusing on early identification and intervention offer our best chances to close those gaps.

I don't think the Board should have much of a role in selecting curriculum. We need to trust that we hire the best people to select the curriculum, and we do have a robust curriculum review process that has served us fairly well over the years, and it works best when teachers are driving that train, not the Board. Curriculum choice does matter in closing the Gaps, some curriculum is better than others, and I trust teachers to judge what works best for students. I do feel very strongly that teachers should be always at the heart of every discussion and decision about curriculum.

Overall the WAY in which we use the technology is more important than the technology itself. For example I have seen Smart Boards used very effectively, and I have seen them used as glorified chalkboards. One is exciting and innovative, and the other is a VERY expensive chalkboard/overhead projector combo. A good use of 1:1 Chromebooks is getting rid of heavy text books. Students at the

secondary level frequently carry backpacks that can be in excess of 30 pounds, or much more. Another good use is the ability to share projects in real time.

I don't think it is realistic to have a 1:1 program and opt out because likely your curriculum will revolve around using the device. I don't think it is reasonable to expect teachers to develop two separate curricula, one for 1:1 kids, and one for kids without Chromebooks. However I do think we need to set policies and ensure that our kids are also unplugging regularly. If our Chromebooks are enhancing the educational experience, and helping students learn how to use technology, that is great, but if they are just using them to play games and take selfies, then they aren't worth it. Another concern with Chromebooks is that they require an internet connection to be useful, and not all families have internet at home. I know the district is talking about ways to help families who can't afford it to get internet, but knowing what I pay for my service, that seems like it could get very expensive very quickly, but if there is a cost effective solution then I would be supportive of that.

I also think we need to be very careful and pointed about guarding against cyber bullying. We can't always control what students do with technology, but I feel we would be remiss if we gave students an enhanced ability to cyber bully one another.

One concern not mentioned here is that Districts in the past have used these devices to essentially spy on students through the web cameras. A 1:1 program comes with a bevy of concerns that we absolutely need policies to govern. In short I feel that train is moving and I am prepared to ask tough questions and listen to concerns to ensure it is implemented in ways that support, and don't detract from, the educational experience.

#### SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS:

State law allows school board directors to be elected by district (Iowa code 278.1) instead of all being elected "at large". Changing to electing directors by district would likely result in guaranteeing one director from North Liberty, and one from Coralville.

22. Would you be willing to put a question on the ballot that will give voters the choice about whether school board directors should be elected by district? Why or why not?

I do not support this concept. As a candidate it would be great, because you would have less turf to cover, however, one advantage of electing at large candidates is that I am forced to consider the perspectives and opinions of folks from all over the district. Also, this could potentially limit the number of people from Coralville or North Liberty on the Board. Why should Coralville or North Liberty have only one Board member apiece? If qualified people from any part of the district want to run, and if people want to elect them, then I see no reason for not having 4 people from North Liberty on the Board if that were the case. I think that our communities already suffer from too much division, and personally would like to be a part of bringing us together more.

It also hasn't been my perception that issues the Board addresses fall neatly into "Coralville, or Iowa City, or Hills, or North Liberty" issues. They tend to be district wide issues, and so I feel it is important to have a district wide perspective when tackling them. One benefit I see in running all over the district is I truly have to consider the perceptions and experiences outside of my community and my neighborhood, and I feel this will make me a better Board member.