

# Great Falls Education Association

## School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Name Jan Cahill Date April 13, 2017

1. Please describe your personal experience and involvement with the Great Falls Public Schools or any other public school system in the past five years that lead you to believe that you will be a successful school board member.

I have been honored to serve on the Board of Trustees for the Great Falls Public Schools since 2005. I serve as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. I continue to serve as a director on the Montana School Boards Association Board of Directors. I am a member of the Montana School Insurance Group Authority Board of Directors. MSGIA provides worker's compensation insurance to 98% of Montana school districts including Great Falls. I also serve on the Board Budget Committee and District Calendar Committee. During my tenure as Board Chair the district hired Tammy Lacey as Superintendent and more recently, witnessed the successful passage of a \$98.8 million bond. I am a member of the panel that reviews qualifications of architects and construction firms and determines what firms will be recommended to the Board. I believe there have been eleven selection meetings since January. I am proud that I have not missed any regular or special meetings of the Board of Trustees in the past five years. I am very proud of the high-quality education program available to every student in the Great Falls Public Schools. This world-class education program is the result of outstanding professional teachers and administrators dedicated to educational excellence as well as a great cadre of classified employees who provide exemplary services to our schools. I was fortunate to begin my career in education as a student teacher at East Middle School (1979) and continue my career in education with the Vaughn Public Schools where I serve as Superintendent of Schools.

2. What is your view of public education's purpose? Charters? Vouchers?

The purpose of public education is to provide the best possible opportunity for every child to become an informed adult who will become a positive member of society and a productive member of the work force which is critical to the continuation of the greatest democracy in the world. The purpose of education has expanded over the past eighty years to include a plethora of curriculum additions that were unheard of when the first free public school was founded 200 years ago. Today public education is expected to provide more and more curriculum opportunities for students as they prepare for an ever changing and challenging world. The Great Falls Public Schools excel in meeting the purpose of a public education.

I do not support state funding of private charter schools. One objection to state funded privately operated charter schools is the lack of accountability regarding accreditation standards, teacher certification and a governance system left to a non-elected board that is not accountable to the community. State funding of private charter schools inevitably

results in lower funding for public schools. Montana already provides for charter schools that are established and operated by public school districts and governed by locally elected school boards. The Bridger Alternative Program created by the Bozeman Public Schools is a recent example of a publicly operated charter school.

I do not support vouchers for private schools. Although not part of the question, I also do not support tax credits that redirects funding to private schools. Any reduction in public funding as the result of vouchers or tax credits harms the ability of school districts to provide a high-quality free public education program for students. Vouchers and tax credits used for parochial schools are unconstitutional under Article 10, Section 6 of the Montana Constitution which prohibits direct or indirect appropriations of public funds to parochial schools.

3. **What is your understanding of the local school board's role in the educational process?**

The role of our local board in the educational process is: (1) set policies; (2) provide oversight on the fiscal operations of the district; (3) determine K-12 curriculum; (4) be accessible to the public with the understanding that individual trustees have no authority away from a regular or special meeting of the board; (5) participate in goal setting and strategic planning that provides a positive relationship with district personnel and the community; and (6) hire the best qualified superintendent.

In addition, the board must always avoid any attempt to micromanage the day-to-day operations of the district. We are a governing board that entrusts the operational management of the district to the superintendent and those she supervises.

It also helps for board members to be ambassadors of good-will regarding the district. This is true every day but especially when asking the public to support levies. It is also important for trustees to be present at as many school functions as possible to demonstrate a personal commitment to staff and students/parents.

4. **What will be your top three (3) objectives, if elected to the school board?**

Make sure the \$98.8 million in new school construction and facility upgrades is used wisely to assure the community that our new school buildings and remodeled schools are receiving best "bang for our buck".

Make sure the district continues to provide professional training opportunities for new and veteran staff. Recent budget reductions in training are cause for concern and I hope we will be able to find additional funds to maintain professional development at the highest level possible. Along with professional development is the need to remain competitive in the recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators. I look

forward, if re-elected, to continue working on the Board Budget Committee as we build the 2018-2019 budget and formulate possible levy requests.

Maintain the commitment by each trustee to the governance model of the Great Falls Board of Trustees. This provides appropriate oversight and guidance of the district through delegation of operational responsibilities to our superintendent and results in an effective educational program.

5. Do you have any specific changes you want to make in school district policies, programs, or the various curricula being offered? If so, what changes do you want to make and why?

I do not have any specific changes to policies, programs, or curricula that I would like to see implemented. Of course, there will be changes to our curriculum in coming years as we meet new standards set by the state and address educational needs from students. Policies will always be reviewed and adopted as circumstances dictate.

6. Have you ever had the opportunity to belong to a union? Did you join the union? Why or why not?

I was a member of the Belt Education Association between 1979 and 1985. I was an officer (Secretary) for two years in the BEA. I joined the BEA my first year of teaching as my father and mother were ardent supporters of unions. I maintained my union membership until I became an administrator (1985) and was no longer eligible to remain a member of the union. I was also a member of the Musicians Union (Billings and Great Falls) for 19 years (1966 – 1985).

7. If offered, would you accept our endorsement?

I would enthusiastically accept the GFEA endorsement and would be honored to receive such an endorsement.