

Extended Platform

1. Reopening Schools Safely

We must reopen our schools in September. Children in the City face enough challenges already. There are single parents working two jobs, who are unable to supervise remote education. Children learning remotely do not receive the benefit of the free breakfast program, and hungry children do not learn well. While many efforts have been made during the pandemic to provide for those living in poverty, there is no substitute as effective as bringing a hungry child into a cafeteria and handing them something to eat. Remote learning is failing the poorest and most disadvantaged students, especially those with disabilities who need specialized instruction.

Parents often work in jobs which bring them into contact with other people. I will not tell them that our teachers cannot do that same thing, and so their already disadvantaged child must slip further behind. For too long the district has been run for the benefit of adults rather than children. Although it may be difficult at times, we must put our children first because they are our future.

That said, it is clear that the school district has not made adequate preparations at this time. Pictures released of students and staff standing too close together, not following state health guidelines, would cause any reasonable person concern. We need to establish a program to monitor the implementation of our reopening plan.

We should expect that changes will need to be made; if a procedure isn't working, we should examine it and rethink as necessary. Often with a bureaucracy, rules are put in place that don't work, and people pretend to follow them. That approach is not acceptable here. In the long run, it will be less troublesome to confront problems and solve them early on, than to go along to get along. Because the tendency will be to do the latter, we need to make sure our reopening procedures are actively monitored and subject to question.

I believe the best way to ensure that we are diligent is to be completely transparent, so that parents and teachers have the full picture, and can advocate for their needs and those of their students or children. Then we need to have persons whose job it is to listen, and who have the power to act on the feedback they receive. We can reopen our schools safely if these steps are taken.

2. Fiscal Accountability

According to 2019-2020 RCSD budget, **it now costs \$37,454 per year to educate a student in Rochester.** Rochester's per-student spending is among the highest in the nation. New York City spends only \$28,808 per student per year, and faces the same, if not greater, urban problems that Rochester does. New York City's graduation rate is 79%, while Rochester's is 68%. By comparison, almost all of the suburbs have graduation rates over 90%, and the average for Monroe County (including the city school district) is 88%.

The clear implication is that our money is being wasted. Either it's being spent on programs that don't serve our children's needs, or diverted to repay political favors from individuals and corporate interests. Whatever the truth may be, what we're doing now simply isn't working.

It is time for new leadership. I am not going to rubber-stamp every pet project, or tolerate waste rather than rock the boat. I do not have to fear upsetting the establishment, because if I am elected to the School Board, it will have nothing to do with the establishment's support. It will be entirely due to the people of Rochester, and I will be beholden to the people alone.

From the beginning, I have chosen not to seek the endorsement of the Democratic Committee, nor the support of any part of the political establishment. If I win, it will be entirely due to my own efforts, and those of my personal supporters. I will not require the support of the political establishment should I seek re-election. I will be able to do what I believe is right, without regard to political pressures.

I will make sure that every dollar spent is going to help our children get a better education, and nothing else. I will talk to the teachers and hear what they have to say, and I will take seriously those who feel that things are not being done right. I will demand good reasons for all our expenses, and I will back up those willing to make a change. After the first year, I promise that I will give a report to the people -- not to the City Council, not to the Mayor, but to the people.

I know, and the people will know, that I will sink or swim on my ability to satisfy our City's parents that their children are getting a good education. And I will sink or swim on my ability to explain to the people what I have done with their hard earned money. I promise that I will fulfill this duty to the best of my ability.

3. Alternative Education

There are many good ideas out there about how to educate our children, but few ideas are being tried. It would be one thing if our children were getting an excellent education in the City. But they're not, and it is morally indefensible to ignore or halfheartedly support new ideas when the old ones aren't working. Our children pay the price for our inability to move forward.

I would like to see a school district where our children have many different avenues open to them. I want our children to have the learning environment most suited for their talents and abilities, most suited to the way each individual child is best able to learn. Education is too important to our future for us to shove every child into a one-size-fits-all mold.

That is why I will create a Council of Advisors composed of those who have given years of their lives to the study and practice of alternative education. Those who follow the traditional assembly line method of education are also welcome to be represented if they are knowledgeable. I don't want to throw out what we have, I want to keep it and add more alternatives, more choices, more avenues that our children can travel on their journey to knowledge, and adulthood.

4. Community Meetings

Anyone who has experience in the Rochester City School District knows that parent participation is lacking. I will not join those who point the finger of blame at parents. The reality of life in the City is that many parents are working more than one job, raising children without a partner, taking care of an older family member, or just dealing with any of the many difficulties of life in our urban environment. The schedule of meetings and school events all too often makes no accommodation for the hardships parents face.

At the present time, of course, in-person meetings are not feasible, but life will return to normal sometime. Should I be elected, I will serve a four year term on the School Board. When the time is right, I would like to do better than we have done before.

I propose that public meetings be held not only in the Central Office, but as much as possible in the communities where people work and live. Meetings should be held in schools, churches, community centers, and anywhere else members of our community congregate. It's long past time that we made a conscious effort to reach out to parents. We should also hold public meetings more often. If I must hold meetings alone, without any other school board members present, then that is what I will do.

5. Protect Teachers' Freedom of Speech

As I began to investigate running for the City School Board, I sought out those who were already working and advocating to improve our children's education. While I was doing this, I was surprised to be approached by a number of teachers in the Rochester City School District. They told me that they had been waiting for someone to bring a new political party to the educational process, a new voice.

Many of our City's teachers are frustrated with the school district's policies. However, they feel that if they speak out, if they criticize the way things are done, they will be subject to reprisal. They told me that they are held back by this fear.

This is unacceptable. We must put in place protections for those who are only trying to provide input and help the school district to be the best environment for education that it can be. Teachers have a right to express their opinions without fear of reprisal.

I think it is vitally important for us to learn from our teachers what is being done right and what is being done wrong. If I am elected to the School Board, I promise to do everything within my authority to support our teachers' right to freedom of speech.

6. Hold school administrators accountable

Right now we have administrators taking home six-figure incomes while their students graduate to minimum wage jobs -- or no job at all. The success or failure of their students has no impact on their lavish salaries and perks. This is also something which I find unacceptable.

It's time we linked district administrator salaries to concrete metrics, such as student performance and parent satisfaction.

It is something widely talked about to link teacher salaries to student performance. But many teachers I have spoken with tell me that they do not have the resources or decision making power necessary to do better. Often, the efforts of our teachers are blocked, or left to wither for lack of support. It is the administrators who are responsible for this failure, but it is the teachers who take the blame, while administrators take home fat paychecks.

I will do everything in my power to change this situation, and hold those accountable who actually have the power to make a change, those who are actually responsible for the problems our schools are facing.

It's been said that we need to have high salaries to attract the best and the brightest. But, we've been doing that for decades now and it hasn't produced any substantial improvements. Let's try something else. We will give newly hired administrators a one year grace period so that struggling schools will still attract talented people.

7. Protect Student Privacy

Twenty years ago, the Patriot Act gave the government the power to access student records which would otherwise remain private. These include mental health and other medical records, disciplinary records, and even student essays which might be considered "un-American". Today the covid epidemic has resulted in similar access to private information. For example, contact tracing maps out a student's social networks, a tempting trove of information for law enforcement, and one which may harm an already over-policed demographic.

Childhood is a time of innocence, and also a time when people make mistakes. Our society already collects too much data on people, and engages in surveillance to an unprecedented degree. The least we can do is insulate our children from these intrusions, until such time as they are adults and better prepared to deal with it. I will make it a top priority to find out what data we are collecting on our children, who has access to it – and how best to ensure that data is deleted once it is no longer necessary to keep it.

8. Improve use of Information Technology

I have spent the last 17 years working in the field of Information Technology, and I have seen how a small investment in technology, if done wisely, can result in huge gains in productivity and cost savings. If elected to the School Board, I will use my expertise to guide and implement a plan to modernize the school district's record keeping and data processing capabilities.

I have the expertise to make sure that our money is spent wisely in this area. For example, contrary to what many believe, we don't have to give hundreds of thousands of dollars to Microsoft to have good, useful computers for our children. There is plenty of high-quality, completely free software out there such as Linux and OpenOffice, which is as good if not better.