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2016 Delaware School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Please introduce yourself giving a brief background of your qualifications and why you are running for the Lake Forest Board of Education.

My name is Earle Dempsey and I am running for re-election to the Board of Education for the Lake Forest School District. As the newest member to Lake's Board, I was elected in May 2015 to fill out the one year remaining on my seat's term. After my first year, I am even more excited and energized to continue with the great results the Board and the District have accomplished. I am a graduate of Lake Forest (having attended all grades K-12), have a B.S. in Business Administration from Salisbury University, and earned my MBA from Delaware State University. I currently work for the Delaware Department of Technology and Information (DTI). I have four children attending Lake Forest schools.

1. What do you see as the board's roles and responsibilities?

The Board works together to determine policy based on the vision and goals for the future of the District while operating within state and federal guidelines. The Board must also put in place the 'best of the best' administrators to carry out those policies and allow them to do their jobs with as much Board support as required. There must be superior administrators and teachers for the District to succeed, and those that aren't committed to being superior must be improved or replaced.

2. How would you describe an effective school board member?

An effective Board member must be open-minded and willing to listen to all viewpoints, maintain patience and professionalism, and support collective decisions. A good Board member recognizes that his or her authority is only relevant when convened together with the rest of the Board. Outside of that, the Board member will act only as a liaison between community and school, and back.

3. What skills, experience, expertise or resources will you bring to the board if elected?

One of the greatest advantages of my background is that I grew up a Spartan and maintain close ties to the community. When I graduated in 1990, I was well prepared for my college career and for the leadership roles I have undertaken since then. I know the great history of Lake Forest and understand the community pride that has existed for decades.

In my current role with DTI, I manage partnerships with the Department of Education, the 19 School Districts, and all the Charter Schools in Delaware. Additionally, I teach undergraduate and graduate courses in business and IT at both Delaware State and Wilmington Universities. I enjoy helping prepare and encourage my students for their future lives in the business world. I am a very involved leader in the Delaware Volunteer Fire Service, assist with Felton Little League as a Board Member, and serve as an advisor for several non-profits in the State



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4. Please briefly share your vision for education in your district.

Briefly, my vision is providing equal opportunities for college or career readiness. Getting a good education does not simply mean providing our children with the skills and abilities to be 'competitive' on an application to Harvard. It means preparing our children to be productive, responsible members of their communities and society as a whole. It means providing teachers with all available resources and technology to help set our students on a path of lifelong learning. It means providing students with the best educational tools and resources to help them pursue their goals.

For some, Lake Forest will be the very beginning of their formal education and it is important that every graduating high school student understands that he or she has the resources within the state to continue their education at the college level, if they so desire. For others, Lake Forest is the primary start of skill development that allows them to move into a trade or profession where they can immediately be productive and impactful. There is no blanketed right answer for all students, so it is important that we, in Lake Forest, recognize the need for the education we provide to meet those individual needs.

5. How do you feel about family engagement in areas such as shared decision-making at the building and district level? Please share at least three strategies you would use to increase meaningful family engagement in your district.

It takes a whole village to raise a child. Families, schools, and communities all play vital roles in educating and nurturing our students, and proper engagement of all parties is necessary. When making educational decisions, there may not be one single right choice – and there certainly is not one right choice to fit all students. Family, teacher, and school interaction is required to determine the best option for the student needs through open conversations. Strategies for meaningful family engagement:

- 1. Enhance communication methods used to transmit information home to increase overall awareness and knowledge of school activities**
 - 2. Implement a consistent District approach and methodology across all schools so that families with students in multiple schools, or when transitioning from one school to another, receive uniform messages, making engagement easier and more predictable.**
 - 3. Encourage involvement and open, respectful conversation through joint family/ staff groups, such as PTA, PTSO, and booster organizations.**
6. Please explain what your district will do or has done to comply with current anti-bully laws in Delaware? If elected, what steps would you take to address bullying, harassment and intimidation in your schools? What specific strategies would you use to improve school climate and safety?

As all schools and Districts continue to receive reports of bullying, it is safe to say that, while progress has been made, more efforts are necessary. Schools must take claims of bullying seriously and have a zero-tolerance policy regarding such behavior.



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Reporting mechanisms that are in place must be properly communicated, lines of responsibility made crystal clear, and reporting requirements followed without fail. Families must be made aware of and embrace the need to eliminate bullying, the efforts in place to do so, and the unfortunate results of the actions continuing. Then, families must be held accountable when it occurs.

7. Please share your views on state assessments and the role they play in the following areas:

A. Student Achievement

Helps assess student progress, current needs, and future placement. Students should not become 'just a number;' instead, individual achievement should be used to cater each student's educational path.

B. School performance

Allows for year-over-year comparisons and target schools where demographics or instructional needs dictate different approaches

C. Teacher accountability

Should be incorporated as one of the many factors used to assess teacher success and performance, without too much weight placed on any one particular factor.

D. Student accountability

Holding students accountable for assessment results takes a careful mix of teacher, student, and family belief and commitment.

8. Please share your views on the current state initiative to reduce the amount of testing in our schools. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Testing is important. It provides a wealth of information that can be used to help the overall educational process for each student. I remember – and still have – all the CAT tests taken each year from elementary through high school. However, the amount of testing and number of different tests going on in our State is too much. Some reduction and consolidation is necessary. I subscribe to the 'less is more' philosophy. Less (the appropriate amount of) testing will mean more time for instructional and growth opportunities.

9. There continues to be a focus on full inclusion in our schools statewide. If elected, how would you ensure our educators receive adequate professional development on inclusion strategies, implementation of IEPs, diversity training for teachers and students and the necessary supports for sustained and successful inclusion?

I know that sessions on the dynamics of inclusion and special education in our schools has been, and continue to be, a priority with Lake's professional development program. IEP's must be followed, as they are critical to furthering each student's capacity and potential.



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10. What are your views on allocating education funding in your district so that the money follows the child?

This is not a topic that has arisen during my 10 months on the Board, and it is one that would require greater research and inquiry – more than permitted in answering this survey – on my part before adequately and comfortably expressing a view on the topic.

11. During times of fiscal constraint, what programs would you consider essential to keep or implement in order to maintain or exceed the current level of education in your district and why?

Programs that should be kept during tough fiscal times should be those that:

- a) **Generate the most value per student dollar**
- b) **Display the greatest overall participation rates**
- c) **Record the greatest student outcomes and successes**
- d) **Can generate private partnerships or support for implementation**

12. Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary?

Without a doubt, extracurricular activities are essential. A child's educational experience and formative years should not simply consist of classroom learning during school hours. A district and school should provide students with an abundance of options to expand and cater to their interests in an effort to create well-adjusted, well-rounded citizens.

13. Do you feel that subjects such as music, art, physical education, technology, and foreign languages play an important part in a child's education? Explain.

Again, our priority in Education should be to produce well-balanced individuals who are exposed to all facets of our world. Students should be given an opportunity to explore areas that are new or unknown to them; to make their own decisions about pursuing their interests. As a member of the Delaware STEM Council, I see how students who may have a proclivity for science or technical paths and careers never pursue those interests simply because they are not aware of the opportunities. That is unfortunate.

14. If you could change one thing about the district's proposed school budget, what would it be and why?

I would find a way to pay our teaching staff more. The criticality of the job our teachers do on a daily basis is second to none. They wear so many different hats – educator, confidant, coach, mentor, goal-setter – as they develop our young minds today to be the leaders of our world tomorrow.



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15. What are the educational strengths in your district?

So many good things exist within our jewel of a District: a record-setting Odyssey of the Mind program; a 1:1 teaching initiative at the high school for individualized learning; an outstanding FFA organization (whose work is vital to the agricultural lifeblood of our community), at both the High School and Middle School; Career & Technical Education programs and tracks in our high school; unbelievable support and backing from our community leaders and businesses; tremendous teachers who put their heart and soul into awakening young minds; a sense of community pride that makes other Districts envious.

16. What are the educational challenges in your district?

Our student population is extremely economically, culturally, and intellectually diverse, with students arriving to our schools each day with a myriad of individual needs that result in personalized educational goals. Teachers strive very hard to meet these needs and accomplish their goals every day.

17. With an increased focus on personalized learning and advancements in technology, what steps would you take to ensure the privacy and protection of student data?

Through my work at DTI, I know that the State of Delaware takes the security of our systems and the protection of our data extremely seriously. The security policies and procedures that have been instituted and the governance that exists has helped Delaware remain very secure. Through the District's work with the Department of Education, it is incumbent upon both organizations to ensure these policies are followed not as best practices, but as minimum requirements.

18. Do you see yourself primarily as a representative of the community or as a representative of the school system?

I am elected – chosen by the community – to be both. First and foremost, every year the taxpaying residents of our School District consciously choose whom it is that they want representing them to be their voice on the Board. Consequently, I feel that also means they have chosen me to be a representative of the school system back to them. I take both roles very seriously. My role is about the students, their families, and the community, and challenging the status quo on their behalf.



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19. What are your three overall education priorities that, in a perfect world, you would accomplish during your time in office? How will you go about achieving them? Why are these most important?

My three overall priorities to accomplish in a perfect world would be to:

- a) Ensure all administrative positions are filled with the best-of-the-best educational leaders, and then empower them to lead their schools to greatness.**
- b) Promote a culture within the District that ensures Lake Forest is regarded as employer of choice. If we are held in this regard, the very best teachers will be eager to join us and our students, others will be envious of our environment and results, and our most talented teachers will stay with the District throughout their careers.**
- c) Achieve the best understanding, support, and involvement from each of our students' families, resulting in strong, successful home/ school partnerships.**