

Responses submitted by Courtney Martin

1. How will you empower educators to develop flexible environments that recognize that learning happens in different places, at different times, and in different ways, inside and outside of school? (2-minute response) – **I think we are all aware that no two people are the same in every aspect of life. I can see that in my own home with my own three children who all couldn't be more different than each other. It shouldn't be any surprise that not all children learn the same way either. The board is fully aware of this and has for years been supportive of differentiated learning and flexibility within schools as well as classrooms. The new Rockwell and Johnson schools have been purposely designed around those exact principles. Teachers are encouraged to think outside the box and within the parameters of the curriculum, use multiple ways and mediums to ensure success with all students. As a member of the curriculum committee, I have and will continue to support any new, researched and proven methods that enhance overall education of our children and help foster independent and well-rounded thinkers.**

2. What do you think the schools are doing right to prepare students for a successful future? Likewise, what do you think could be improved upon and how would you make that happen? (3-minute response) –

**There are so many things that the schools are doing right it's hard to mention them all. I would like to break this question down by school.**

**Berry/Rockwell – Positive: Class size is a huge factor in success at this age level. Young children need more personal 1 on 1 attention. The administration and current board recognize this and make it a priority to keep the numbers as low as possible. At these ages it is critical that children can grasp the basic fundamentals of language arts and math. Challenge: Interventionists are a much-needed resource at this age, but due to budgetary restrictions, having enough people to support those children has been rough. Currently we have 3153 students total in the district. 464 of those students receive intervention in either math or ELA. That's almost 15% of the population. Recently the focus has been more on math and the language arts numbers have become stagnant for movement. One of our goals for this school year is to make sure the proper interventionists are in place to work with the kids as well as work with classroom teachers doing instructional coaching to help bridge that gap and catch issues as early as possible.**

**Johnson – Positive: Although class size is important here as well, and is also a focus, the children are given a little more freedom and responsibility to self-advocate and work independently. By this time those basic skills should be fully established and now need to be developed in a broader way. Johnson teachers and staff work collectively with each other to help harness this newfound independence. They also work vertically with the teachers at the middle school to make sure the kids are prepared to move on. Challenge: Not enough administrative support. Next year when the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is added to Johnson it will put a large strain on the current administrative staff. My focus will be on making sure the students and teachers are given the proper support that is needed.**

**Middle – Positive: In my opinion, these years are one of the most important. The behaviors and work ethic learned at this age will create success in high school, college and beyond. Not only does the middle school provide opportunities for kids to be challenged academically, they also expose them to other avenues of interest with a wide variety of programs and clubs. The curriculum is rigorous and students as well as teachers are held to the highest of standards. But most importantly, they focus on being positive, contributing members of society. They are constantly bringing in programs or speakers focusing on kindness and inclusion of all people. Challenge: Unlike the elementary schools, class size at the middle school is increasingly becoming an issue. We need to pay attention here as well and do everything we can to make sure the students are getting the attention and services they need.**

**High – Positive: The biggest positive accomplishment in my opinion at the HS that prepares the students for success is the development and implementation of the pathways. Through partnerships with local businesses, agencies and institutes they have created six pathways in: Arts, Education, Global Studies, Business, Healthcare and Career Technical Readiness (Engineering, Computer Science, Manufacturing). These pathways give students the opportunity to get hands on personalized experiences in these fields through not only the classroom work, but internships and real-life experiences as. They now have the real chance to try out something they are interested in before they get to college so that when the time comes, they will have a better understanding of the field of study as well as earn a**

certificate and in most cases, college credit. Bethel is a pioneer in this, and other districts are now coming to us to see what we are doing and creating their own pathways and partnerships for their students. Challenge: I believe one of the biggest challenges they face is climate and parent involvement. Quite frankly, there just isn't enough of it. I am guilty of it as well. As the kids get older, and start to become young adults, parents tend to back away and become less involved. There has been an increasing number of instances where mean and hateful behavior regarding political view and race. I firmly believe that this type of behavior starts at home and is unacceptable and needs to stop. At our last meeting, an official ADHOC committee was formed which I am a part of that will specifically focus on this issue and work towards finding solutions that work.

3. What do you think are the most important ways we can keep our kids safe in school? How do you balance keeping kids safe with making sure that they are not afraid? (3-minute response) **This is a very difficult question for me to personally answer as well as I'm sure it would be for anyone who had a child in school on the day Sandy Hook took place. I will never forget that day as I'm sure none of you will either. I can't even begin to imagine what the parents of the victims felt or any parent of any child who was a victim of a school shooting. My heart goes out to all of them. What I also remember very vividly was the next day when the kids went back to school. The visual sight of the police officers standing guard brought a feeling of relief and gratitude to see them but also a deep sadness that this may be our new normal. No child should be afraid to go to school and no parent should be afraid to send them. Immediately following the schools went full speed in ensuring the safety of our children. It became a primary focus and has stayed a top priority. I am not even going to pretend to be an expert on security measures or tactics. As a district, the Bethel Police department has been a wonderful partner in helping to create plans and procedures that the staff have been trained on and practiced on a regular basis. These are all designed with the kids in mind, specifically focused on them being prepared but not in a way that they feel fear. The school psychologists are also involved in the process and every aspect is extremely well thought out and tested before implemented in the schools. However, our biggest issue when it comes to safety has more to do with the emotional health and well being of the children themselves. Mental health is a major problem that needs to be addressed. I have been and will continue to be a huge supporter of providing more support for the students and staff in this area. We can't continue to wait until an issue arises. Being proactive is the only way to stop this epidemic in our country, in our town and in our schools. As parents, we need to be more aware of the challenges our children face. As a board member, I will continue to fight for our children by supporting programs that educate parents, students and teachers on these issues and support requests for additional staff needed for social and emotional wellbeing.**

4. How will you ensure schools cultivate engaged and informed citizens, ready to work together across difference and actively participate in our democracy? (2-minute response) **The thing I love most about our country is the right to think for yourself and form your own opinions. I believe it is extremely important for our children to know and understand our history and mistakes of the past to learn from that and make sure they are not repeated. I believe the schools are already doing a great job at this so I will continue to support their efforts and encourage them to keep up the good work. For example, at the elementary level, they hold mock elections and discuss real world issues in an age appropriate manner. At the middle school and high school, they have student government and ambassadors, as well as clubs focusing on history, social issues and current events. At the HS specifically, students are challenged daily to be forward thinkers and given many opportunities to learn and participate in democracy. As a board, we do a good of recognizing students who are leaders among their peers. I do however feel that there is room to grow from a board standpoint in this area and am committed to doing so. Not only by recognizing the leaders, but by identifying those who may not have the loudest voice but are living examples of kindness and acceptance of all people. The best way I can contribute is by being an example myself. I am extremely proud of our current board members who also live by that every day in our meetings. Contrary to some people's belief, I think politics and political agenda have no business in education and on a Board of Ed. Our current members listen to each other's ideas and opinions respectfully and without political prejudice. The only concern is for the students. And that is exactly the way it should be.**

5. If you were to send a newsletter to every Bethel household, around what three issues would you focus your update? (The hypothetical newsletter would be coming directly from you, as a representative of your position, in addition to any and all communications that are currently available. 30-second response) **I would approach this the same way I approach my team meetings at work. I would first celebrate our wins. It's important for the community to see all the great things that are going on and especially how their tax dollars are being spent. We have so many amazing**

students and faculty who are doing incredible things. More people should know about it. It's something our town should be extremely proud of. The second aspect should be to update. I believe transparency is key and would provide an update on what is currently going on in the district detailing what we have completed, what we are in progress of working on, where we are looking to go in the near future. This would include an update on our financial status, as well as policy, curriculum and facilities updates. The final aspect would be to educate. Things are constantly changing in the world of education and in our world in general. I would focus on one or two things that I think people should be aware of whether it be new apps that kids are using or a new math curriculum that is being used that may be different from what parents are used to or anything that could be considered valuable information to help in the success of our students.

6. What are your qualifications for running for the Board of Education? (30-second response) **First and foremost, I have absolutely no political agenda and do this solely for the kids and community. On a personal level, I have 3 children who attend Bethel Public schools. One currently in the High School, one at Bethel Middle School and one at Berry. This year will be my 10<sup>th</sup> and final year at Berry as well. It is bittersweet. From an education standpoint, I now have almost 4 years' experience as a current board member. Previous to that, I spent 4 years with the Bethel Education Foundation, ending my time as Chairwoman, where I had the privilege of hearing first hand from the teachers and administrators about their experiences in the classroom and what they were in need of through grants they applied for. I also was able to establish relationships with local officials and business owners and the financial challenges they face in supporting the schools without putting a strain on their businesses through donations they were constantly being asked for. From a professional standpoint, I am a local real estate agent and since Jan of 2018, I have personally sold over 67 homes in Bethel alone. I understand more than most what people are looking for in a community and how important a thriving school district is to our property values and the economy.**

7. Numerous rankings are published each year comparing our schools against others in the region and state. There are a number of factors that go into these rankings. What would you prioritize in order to improve our rankings? (Our intent for this question is for the Candidate to identify the various factors used in the many ranking systems, and then prioritize the most important factors. 1-minute response) **First off, these rankings are not always fair and at the core, sometimes go against what we are trying to accomplish as a district. To me, what is most important is growth. I would be more focused on moving students forward then teaching to a standardized test. Now some of the factors are much more valuable than others. Graduation rate, how many students attend some sort of schooling after high school including trade schools and how many instances of bullying are noted in my opinion should hold more weight than how we compare on one specific test to the rest of the state. Especially when these tests are constantly changing so its hard to determine where we fall. Over the past few years our focus has been on forward movement of the kids who were currently receiving intervention and we have seen tremendous success in this area. This year our focus has moved more towards the students who sit in the middle of the pack. Their growth has been sort of stagnant and the board and administration both agree this needs to change. That's why it has been made a top priority this year.**

8. What role, if any, do you think students should have in the political process? (1-minute response) **I think that students should be educated on the process and at an age appropriate level and have a voice in what happens in their school. Everyone has a right to be heard and their concerns should be taken seriously. They should also be taught not only our federal system, but our local town hall system as well. At the same time, what we really need to be making sure of is that we are teaching them to respect the fact that not everyone will agree with them and we need to work together not against each other. The current political climate in our country and in our town has been reprehensible and hurtful. I am embarrassed at how people from both sides of the aisle have behaved. The social media forums have become a breeding ground for people to attack others for their beliefs instead of having a healthy discussion on the issues. We should be engaging the students to take part in changing that climate. They are the future and deserve better than what we have now. Unfortunately, extremists from both sides tend to have the loudest voices and make everyone else look bad. As teachers, parents, community members and elected officials, we have a responsibility to set a different example for future generations and show them that serving the community is an honor and a privilege that shouldn't be abused or taken lightly.**

9. Looking forward, what do you think are the biggest issues on the horizon over the next 5 to 10 years and what would you do to address them? (We are looking for issues that may be facing our own school district over the next 5 to 10 years. 2-minute response) **Some of our biggest issues are our growing population that is outpacing what was previously predicted, as well as keeping up with technology that is rapidly changing. When Dr Carver first came to Bethel, she, as well as a committee I am a part of, developed a 5 year strategic plan for district. Every year the committee meets to go over our goals, what progress has been made, and what are the next steps in achieving those goals. This was something we never had before. It gave the district a clear goal and purpose to work towards. The committee is made up of administrators, teachers, parents, community members, elected officials and stakeholders. I will continue to be a part of these discussions and make sure that we are moving in the right direction. It is hard to say 10 years from now, where we will be and what we will need, but I can promise to do my absolute best at making sure we are putting the children and the community first.**

10. With increasing school enrollments, what additional measures beyond current practices would you implement to validate residency requirements? (1-minute response) **The residency requirements have gotten a lot stricter recently due to the increasing number of people claiming residency who were not actually living here in Bethel. Dr Carver and her staff have been vigilant in investigating any reports that come in as well as the increasing the documentation requirements. At a recent board meeting this issue was discussed. According to central office "since 2017 a total of 40 letters were sent to families who there was suspicion of false residency; 32 of those families provided the verification that they live in Bethel; 6 families have been withdrawn due to being nonresidents; and 2 families are pending this year." Overall, I feel like the process is working but I will continue to follow up and make sure it is staying on track.**

11. As more families move into our great town, we are facing two significant challenges: 1) larger class sizes 2) increased expenses for support services needed for our growing ESL and special needs populations. Supporting this growth adequately (including hiring the needed teachers & support staff) can only be accomplished with an increased budget. Will you support this need this spring when budget season comes along? (2-minute response) **As previously stated, I will remain an advocate for smaller class sizes and prioritize that when it comes to budgeting. When it comes to the increased expenses for English Learners and Special Education Students, that is not something that anyone has a choice in. Per the Bilingual Education Statute, a school building where there are 20\* or more students in the same language group, is mandated to provide a Bilingual Education program provided by a certified staff member. As of October 1<sup>st</sup>, Berry, Rockwell and the High School all currently meet the criteria and we are required by law to add the additional staff member. The average salary for this staff person is \$66,500. When it comes to students with special needs, our Special Education Director has done a tremendous amount of work to develop programs that keep kids in district instead of outplacing them. The average cost to outplace a student is \$75,000 not including transportation. If they require busing, that average cost doubles to \$150,000 per student. Currently we have 411 students receiving special ed services and 18 are outplaced. Again, we are required by law to provide these services but even if we weren't, of course I would support providing them. The problem lies that when the budgets are set, you have no idea how many students you will have the following year. You can estimate but one family moving in with more than one child can send a school over the limit in EL and one more special ed outplaced student is a huge expense. We then must figure out where that money is going to come from. We operate already on a very tight budget and this becomes extremely challenging. The administration is constantly looking for other ways to save money by things like using cost share with other districts and creating those in district programs to keep kids in Bethel which I will continue to support.**

12. Recent research has suggested later school start times may change student achievement outcomes. This topic is currently being investigated in our own school district. One BHS Civics student asks, "What is your opinion of school start times?" (1-minute response) **I am in full support of moving the start times to the new schedule that was proposed. The research shows that the times should be even later but right now, it would be impossible to make a huge jump. Some other districts have started to make small changes as well but we have to consider after school sports and activities. The new schedule would be more cost effective with the buses and get us a little closer to what is recommended. Its not perfect but it is a step in the right direction. Especially with moving the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to Johnson, Berry and Rockwell should be on a schedule with them. It is not cost effective to put just the middle school and the high school on their own runs. It is not a good use of resources that is so clearly needed in other places.**