



# WINONA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

## Winona School Board

Nancy Denzer

### 1. What is your background:

I grew up in Minnesota City just 10 miles outside of Winona and am a product of Winona Area Public Schools. I have resided in Winona the majority of my life. My husband, Maynard Johnson, and I have two grown children and 7 grandchildren. Our children were graduates of WAPS and both choose to be licensed educators as their profession.

#### a. What is your employment history?

After graduating from Winona State University with my Bachelors Degree I worked with youth in a residential treatment center then located in Austin, MN. Maynard and I returned to Winona where I spent nearly six years working with the Winona County Department of Human Services as a child protection social worker. At that time I was also attending graduate classes at Winona State University completing my degree in school counseling. This led me to begin my career of 34 years working with the public school system. I spent one year contracted with St. Charles, Lewiston-Altura and Dover-Eyota as a licensed school social worker after which all three schools decided to employ their own school social worker. I began a 15 year career with Lewiston-Altura School District as a school social worker/school counselor having both licensures with the Minnesota Department of Education. In 1999 I was hired by Rochester Public Schools as a principal and retired from Rochester in 2018 after 19 years of service to both high school and middle school students, staff and the community.

#### b. What is your educational background?

I earned a Bachelors, Masters and Education Specialist Degree all from Winona State University. Along with the degrees I have had numerous training opportunities over the years and continue to have current licensure as a principal and superintendent with the Minnesota Department of Education. As a school board member I continue to receive training through the Minnesota School Board Association and professional development offered by the school district.

#### c. Why are you running/what is your motivation for candidacy?

I decided when I was going to retire that I wanted to give back to the community I have lived in most of my life. I believe that my education knowledge and background would be an asset as a member of the school board if I were elected. I ran for WAPS school board in 2018 and was elected in November of 2018. During my four years on the board I have been elected by my board colleagues to be School Board Chair each year.

Running for a second term on the school board is important to me because there have been some significant decisions this school board has made with regard to facilities, budget, curriculum, equity and staffing that I would like to continue being a part of. I am committed to, and believe in, the work of the public schools; that we have excellent staff serving our students and families, including teachers, administrators, support staff, food service, maintenance and any contracted services. My primary purpose in running for school board the first time and now for a second is to serve the community and our public schools so that we can continue to provide excellent quality education to all of our students.

**2. What is the most pressing issue facing the Winona School Board after this election? How should this be addressed?**

Making sure that students have access and opportunity to rigorous curriculum taught by highly trained staff in a safe, respectful and inclusive environment. WAPS has been addressing this through professional development, researching and developing best practice curriculum and creating safe, inclusive environments in each of our facilities. The board has been actively managing the budget striving to achieve our goal of quality education. I believe pursuing a referendum will accomplish educational programming that best meets our needs, now and into the future.

**3. What is the School Board member's role in the daily operation of the district?**

One of the primary roles of a school board is to hire and evaluate the superintendent. The school board sets expectations and parameters by adopting goals, policies and evaluating results. Our charge is to provide leadership to the community on behalf of the school district in a fair, respectful, legal and responsible manner.

**4. What role does the school district have to setting students on a path to career/work exploration?**

Through setting expectations and parameters the board sets the course for the school district followed by monitoring progress and achievement on a regular basis. This work is accomplished through a continued commitment as a board member to study, ask questions, listen, learn and be prepared to participate in board meetings and committee assignments.

**5. What is your opinion about state mandated testing for measuring student success? How should WAPS respond to these tests and scores?**

State mandated testing is something every public school in Minnesota has to comply with and as such WAPS will continue to do so. Our response to testing has been to accept and study the results, embrace the support that is provided yet keep in context that state testing is a snapshot in time and only one component of student progress. I support the district strategy that our day-to-day in-time

assessments are more relevant and important in determining success of students and further that our teaching and support staff are extremely qualified to assess academic achievement making adjustments as necessary.

**6. According to the MN School Board Association, 95% of school districts in Minnesota are led by school boards elected under district-wide at-large seats. What are your thoughts regarding WAPS moving to an all at-large school board seat election process and away from the current system of election by wards?**

I am open to this discussion as a board member and, after gathering relevant information, would support the decision of the majority of the board.

**7. Winona's school district has had significant turnover of staff and leadership and many students have transferred into the private sector. Furthermore, in recent years, the district has not received the most positive press in the media. This has had a negative effect on our community's ability to attract qualified workforce talent as other communities may have better public-school systems for their families. What steps do you believe need to be taken to create a healthy culture of leadership and unity within the district?**

As a school board member and also a long time educator myself I believe that WAPS is an excellent choice for families to consider for their children yet I understand that sometimes a different choice is made and I respect that. I believe that this community is served by a number of school choice options and further that a thriving community is best served by all school choices being supported and embraced for the good of the whole community. Staff turnover is a part of any organization and while changes are difficult they also are opportunities for growth. The district is committed to maintaining a healthy culture for all of our staff to thrive in and appreciate it when the excellent work being done is recognized publicly in a positive manner. I look forward to sharing our progress with others in the community, including the chamber, so a more accurate picture of who we are as a district can be shared with current and prospective residents.

**8. Questions regarding the Winona School District's methods of discipline and safety of students have often appeared in the media. How would you, as a school board member, promote and encourage a healthy atmosphere of discipline while balancing the safety needs of the students?**

As a public school it's important to remember that, other than private data, information is available and as such open to individual interpretation and judgment. As a school board member my goal has been and will continue to have accurate information and data to support decisions that are made. We have done a great deal of planning and actual documented work on the physical and emotional safety at each of our buildings for students and staff. I have and will continue to support planning and implementation of strategies that are used by staff to assure the safety, appropriate interventions and overall well being of all our students and staff.