

Indian Prairie District 204 “Virtual” Candidate Forum



The April 6th election will include 11 candidates, Allison Fosdick, Marina Kosak, Shannon Adcock, Laurie Donahue, Yanmei May Liang, Saba Haider, Susan Taylor-Demming, Supna C. Jain, Kader Sakkaria, Rajesh Narayan, and Robert O. Harris; seeking one of the four open seats on the Indian Prairie School District 204 Board of Education. In an effort to better know and understand those running for this important office, the Confederation reached out to

these candidates and asked that they provide a written answer to a single question. Just as in our traditional candidate forums, the responses of the candidates would be limited to a set amount (in this case 250 words), managed at the discretion of the Confederation. The question we asked the candidates was:

With changing demographics, recent national movements and events, and the uneven impact of remote instruction, what areas should schools focus on moving forward?

Shannon Adcock: IPSD 204 focus should be on a return to full-time in-person learning, transparency, and improved communication. It has faced profound challenges in providing the caliber of education that our community pays significant property taxes to receive. The past year has resulted in less academic rigor and reduced social/emotional enrichment. To move our students forward, it will take a unified board and community vision that incorporates innovative approaches to filling those gaps.



The district and stakeholders have not been aligned in terms of expectations which has resulted in much division within our community. Consistent communication will be vital to advance from the trauma of the pandemic. Given the events of the past year, our students deserve as much collaboration, consistency, and normalcy as possible

If elected to the school board, I will bring a parent perspective and long-term investment as our 3 children are in 6th grade, 4th grade, and Kindergarten. You will always know where I am in the process of governance and voting. With integrity, grit, and teamwork, I will uphold the school board oath while advocating for the 27,000+ students of IPSD 204.

Yanmei May Liang: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone profoundly in the past year. District 204 has encountered many unprecedented situations due to the pandemic. In general, many difficult decisions, including remote instruction were made for the safety and health of students and teachers.

Social isolation has caused tremendous mental stress to students and their families due to long-term remote instruction. Besides, the experiences and outcomes of remote instruction have been impacted unevenly due to different family support and other factors. Therefore, reopening school is the top priority of District 204 as long as we are doing so safely.



As a board member, I would ensure detailed plans with safety evaluation. Schools should provide teachers with reliable and adequate PPE (personal protective equipment). In addition to reinforce students' compliance with rules of wearing masks at school in order to protect staff, students and their families.

During the pandemic, I have continued to volunteer at Bolingbrook Christian Health Center. Although some patients were tested positive, none of the staff has been diagnosed with COVID-19. What has helped to this success is that the clinic has taken responsibility for allowing uniform high-quality protection for staff and guidelines for patients.

Therefore, it is important that we as a district similarly take responsibility for providing PPE to our teachers and make masks mandatory at school. As a public health nurse, I believe that prevention based on science is key to reopening schools.

Marina Kosak: We can all agree that the 2020-2021 school year has been like no other. However, as a 25-year veteran in education and currently working in a public school I have experienced first-hand the trials and tribulations of remote learning. Teachers have been working tremendously hard to create thought provoking lessons for our students. However, we have to realize that our students will not be in the same place academically as they would have been in a normal school year. It is imperative that our administration implement a plan to address the learning gaps that will no doubt now exist.



Our kids have also been living and learning in isolation for almost a year now. Our schools are going to have to be prepared for the social emotional impact that the pandemic has had on our students. The importance of building relationships with students will be more of a necessity than ever. Our faculty and staff need to be equipped with the right tools to address any SEL issues that arise in their classrooms.

Schools cannot ignore the events that have occurred recently in our nation. However, schools need to be a place where ALL students feel safe and have equal opportunities to learn. Teachers must ensure that the students in their classrooms feel comfortable using their voices and teaching the importance of respectfully listening to others' opinions.

For more information, please visit my Facebook page, KosakForKids.

Allison Fosdick: I'm a parent of four students, currently in elementary, middle school, high school, and college. I'm an educator, a volunteer, and a believer in the power of working together. The events of the past year affected all students in ways we never anticipated. To move forward, schools have to focus on what unites us: we're all in the same ocean. But we have to acknowledge that we're not in the same boat. We must identify students most in need of "lifeboats" in the form of extra support and services, and we need to deliver those supports without delay. It's critical that we create equitable opportunities for all students, so that each one has the chance to realize his or her potential.



We have to concentrate on students' social and emotional learning (SEL) as they process the "new normal." Providing students with opportunities to practice what one district principal calls the "second SEL" (to be **Sincere**, to have **Empathy**, and to **Listen**) is the next step. These life skills have never been more relevant, and it's our responsibility to both teach and model these qualities for our students. And it's essential that we do it together. Deliberate investment in "each of us and all of us" is the key to leading D204 into the future of excellence in education. Please visit www.allisonfosdick.com to learn more about my journey to candidacy for IPSD 204 school board. I hope to earn your vote on April 6, 2021!

Robert O. Harris: For over 20 years, I have served in various education leadership roles, K-12 (reading mentor CPS), community colleges, and university capacities. That experience includes, teaching, faculty hiring, curriculum design, directing student and teacher evaluations, course accreditation, and professional certification development. Among others, I previously worked for IBM, HP, AT&T, and Coldwell-Banker. Therefore, I have real-world classroom and business experience.



Today, I am employed at Lewis University as Program Director and Asst. Professor, College of Business. My duties, membership, and student services include teaching classes, university co-chair of Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation (High School & College scholarship), Alpha Phi Alpha Education Committee, and Project Management Club student advisor. Student success, graduation, academic opportunities, and career paths are essential.

With changing demographics, recent national movements and events, and the uneven impact of remote instruction, what areas should schools focus on moving forward?

1. Be student and community focused.
2. Develop a plan of action to return students safely to in person instruction.
3. Help all students grow socially, emotionally, and academically.
4. Commitment to equity and excellence.
5. Encourage open door and collaboration opportunities with parents, community leaders and faculty.
6. Maintain the IPSD 204 mission: Inspire all students to achieve their greatest potential.

Thank you for your consideration.

Supna Jain: The School Board's role could not be more important than it is right now. The Board's primary focus should be assessing the effects of the pandemic on learning.



- They must advocate for district programs that safely bring students/teachers/staff back to school while ensuring they are supported with necessary tools to effectively fulfill their responsibilities.
- They must continuously assess the effects of the pandemic on learning and mental health, and advocate relentlessly for outreach programs (i.e. summer schooling, counseling services, and tutoring services) that would mitigate its negative effects.
- Above all, the Board must exemplify the importance of a strong sense of community. When leaders model effective listening and collaborative skills, the community benefits. Anxiety levels are reduced, student achievement is enhanced, and our children learn to be better citizens.

Simultaneously the Board should commit to ways, the recently adopted equity statement, is put into practice.

- They should commit to viewing issues with an equity lens, ensuring those affected from stated program/fee/policy, are represented.
- They must actively seek opportunities to listen to stakeholders, particularly groups that are often not heard, by holding "listening sessions", to ensure their experiences are understood and represented at the table.
- Lastly, the Board must promote programs that increase students' listening and critical thinking skills, equipping them with tools to become self-aware and contributing members of a diverse community, in turn preparing them for the post-graduation world.

If given the honor to be your School Board member, these are the issues that will be on my mind.

Laurie Donohue: Beyond the immediate responsibility to fully provide our planned in-person option, the district needs to grow activities providing academic and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) support in these unprecedented times. While I have been on the board, we made SEL a district goal and incorporated this concept throughout the district as key to creating student success. This included additional counseling staff in our schools. These challenging times require increasing our SEL and mental health support efforts. For our struggling students, we need increased personalized intervention and additional opportunities for assistance, including an expanded summer school offering.



Our District needs to continue implementing changes supporting all students and inspiring them to achieve their greatest. Over the past 4 years, the District built an emphasis on equity, including: updating curriculums and materials to ensure inclusive representation of our diverse community, improving the diversity of our staff, and increasing under-represented populations in high-school AP classes. To build focus, the Board created a District level equity statement, goals, and are committed to developing a long-term equity plan. These actions need to continue.

I will advocate for innovative actions addressing early academic gap intervention and programs to increase student success after high school graduation. I would like to see more STEM integration across all grade levels, the ability to achieve professional certifications, and grow partnerships with area colleges to allow students to earn credits while in high school. These actions will prepare our students to succeed in the world beyond 204.

Saba Haider: Having moved here 13 years ago with my husband, I found a community that was welcoming, safe and diverse. As a mother of two children, these were values I have always been grateful to have. Now, years later, I want to foster these values but also increase better awareness around community social, emotional, and mental health, community cohesiveness and work hard to extend resources to the students in district 204.

With changing demographics, schools should provide resources and learning opportunities to the diverse families by implementing tools and real-life scenarios reflective of the diverse backgrounds students come from. Teaching tolerance, bias-free language and social engagement initiatives at various levels of our community are needed. This will guide our community towards positivity, stability and growth.

We have to make sure that we are allocating resources to our students in an equitable manner, helping ALL students to thrive. We need to fill the gap that could arise based on race, income level, gender, English language proficiency and learning disabilities.

We have to make sure that all students have access to quality education during remote/hybrid learning. We have to take care of our students that have food insecurities, limited WIFI, need mental health support, speech and occupational therapy, and students with special needs. We should also invest in technological tools to help our students stay more engaged socially and emotionally. We will have to find ways to recover stronger, with a renewed sense of responsibility from all members of the community.

Susan Taylor Demming: Our nation has faced so much this past year and our students have exhibited grace, steadfastness and resiliency beyond measure. Committed and unwavering leadership is imperative to leap any additional rocks strewn in our path over the next few months.



A new era of education delivery has been ushered in and strategic planning must provide students with the resources to meet them wherever they are in their learning attainment. Our teachers have responded admirably, but some students have struggled. Finding what will sustain not only their academic success but rebuild their confidence and emotional well-being are critical. Returning to in-person learning is vital for social and emotional resurgence for students and staff, but not all families will want to return to our buildings just yet, and we must ensure that remote learners, as well as classroom students' needs are met equitably.

In addition to the pandemic, national social and political issues have landed at our classroom doors. Students are asking tough questions and want to have classroom discussions, around national issues. Administration provided an immediate "all staff" link to discuss appropriate classroom conversation approaches after the Jan 6th event. Likewise, over the summer, numerous professional development opportunities occurred, so teachers could guide student dialogue regarding social activism.

So where should our focus be? On all of the above and that's why continued strong board leadership, delegating appropriate administrative authority is imperative. I will continue to exhibit the necessary board leadership for these uncharted waters. Thank You and Re-Elect Susan Taylor-Demming!

Kader Sakkaria: Our schools' face challenges including:

- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Funding
- Class size
- Technology
- High-school-graduation rates
- and Security.



All require fresh perspectives, the ability to tackle complex issues, and clear-eyed decision making. I'll use my leadership experience and familiarity with educational trends to help our district adapt, grow and thrive.

Collaborate with local, state and federal legislators to develop clear procedures and regulations for COVID-19 vaccination and student/teacher health and safety.

Ensure schools are properly funded and zoned to best serve all student populations and geographic areas.

Help more students graduate from high school. Ensuring everyone has the resources they need to earn a diploma.

Set students up for success after high school: whether it's in training programs, community college, a first career, or a 4-year college.

Promote equitable programs that help all kids succeed— regardless of their challenges, ability levels, or learning styles.

Partner with teachers and administrators to help District 204 build its technology infrastructure for high-quality learning, both in the classroom and online.

Who is Kader Sakkaria? • 20+ years District 204 resident • Father of 9th grader at District 204 • Husband of a District 204 substitute teacher • NCTV17 Board Member

Kader's Professional Experience: Chief Technology and Data Officer at Ruffalo Noel Levitz – Veteran tech strategy professional with 25 years of experience. Helping to create student-enrollment, student-success and fundraising solutions for schools and nonprofits.

Rajesh Narayan did not respond to our requests for a response to this question