

GROSSE POINTE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
Questions for Written Response
-Jennifer Herbstreit

Please keep your responses to 3-4 concise sentences per question. Please email me your responses by 5pm Tuesday December 5th.

1. Please briefly describe your experience, leadership and expertise in education, including but not limited to school finance, and why you are uniquely qualified to lead our district.

With 28 years of experience spanning classroom teaching, IB Curriculum leadership, building leadership and district leadership roles, I've had the opportunity to work in four districts across three counties. These experiences across various institutions and systems has provided me vast learning opportunities, connections and resources. While my current title is focused on curriculum and instruction, in actuality, I have played a role much like that of a deputy superintendent. With comprehensive district oversight, including: budget development, grants, human resource management, curriculum and instruction, facilities, bond execution, technology and early childhood oversight and negotiations. It's my broad experience in all areas of district operations, my ability to build relationships, lead teams and my driving focus to provide highly effective learning opportunities for all students that uniquely equips me to lead Grosse Pointe Public Schools.

2. What do you consider the three most critical issues facing Superintendents and Boards of Education today in Michigan specifically and across the country as a whole?

Staffing challenges, a polarized political climate, and adapting to evolving workforce needs are among the most critical issues facing district leaders across our state and country. Having said that, I would also say that within the Grosse Pointe Schools specifically, addressing enrollment decline is also a pressing concern. Navigating these challenges requires proactive approaches that involve transparent communication, community and parent engagement, targeted initiatives and the development of robust programs that meet the needs and interest of a wide number of students. Creating an environment that is rooted in a sense of belonging for all school community members is a foundational piece to many these challenges. Promoting community engagement initiatives to foster constructive dialogue, hosting town hall meetings to address concerns, and establishing partnerships with local media for transparent communication to bridge gaps and build trust. By proactively addressing these issues, we can create a resilient educational system that adapts to the needs of students, the community, and the broader workforce landscape.

3. How many teacher contracts have you negotiated? Describe your approach to managing relationships with teachers' unions and other represented groups in your District.

Having participated in six contract negotiations, I've contributed from both union and administrative perspectives, fostering a balanced understanding. My involvement spans teacher contracts, support staff contracts and ongoing participation in the Contract Maintenance Committee (CMC) process. To manage relationships with the teachers' union and other

represented groups effectively, I prioritize open communication, building relationships of mutual respect, appreciation and acknowledgement for staff, building conflict resolution protocols and developing a unified vision. Building and maintaining positive relationships with employee groups requires ongoing effort, commitment, and a genuine interest in fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. It's about recognizing the mutual benefits of a strong partnership and working together to achieve common goals.

4. How would you handle budget constraints while maintaining high-quality education standards?

To navigate budget constraints while maintaining high-quality education standards, I employ a strategic and collaborative approach. This includes conducting efficiency reviews, developing a facilities master plan, and establishing 3-5 year budget projections aligned with district priorities. Actively seeking stakeholder feedback and pursuing external funding opportunities through grants and partnerships further enhance financial sustainability. By implementing these strategies, the district can navigate budget constraints without compromising educational quality. This requires a proactive, data-driven, and inclusive approach that prioritizes the long-term success and well-being of students, educators, and the entire school community.

5. What is your philosophy on fund equity in Public School budgets? What percentage of expenditures do you feel should be maintained?

I firmly believe that fund equity is crucial for budget security, providing a financial buffer for unforeseen challenges. While a 10% fund equity is a good target, it's essential to regularly assess this percentage along with the district's unique needs and priorities. The primary goal is not only to maintain financial stability but also to strategically use funds to enhance the learning environment and support the district's overall educational objectives. This approach ensures a balanced and resilient financial foundation for sustained success, and helps to build and maintain confidence and security for all stakeholders.

6. Describe your experience with strategic planning in a school district and your thoughts on our current Strategic Plan.

I recently spearheaded an inclusive and comprehensive strategic planning process in my current district. The [final strategic plan](#) envisions a strong, adaptive, and innovative learning institution, prioritizing a human-centered approach with a focus on student and staff wellness, meaningful and engaged learning, resilient systems, inspired staff, strong partnerships and empowered students.

I firmly believe that strategic plans must be dynamic, celebrating existing strengths while propelling the district to new heights. The success of any plan lies in its effective implementation, and I prioritize the process of translating our strategic vision into actionable steps. Providing a clear vision and destination for staff, enabling them to visualize the impact on students' lives each year, fosters a collective commitment to realizing our strategic goals and ensures that the plan serves as a practical guide for continuous improvement and excellence.

While it appears that the most recent strategic plan for GPPSS is in its final phases on paper, it would be important to collaborate with the various leaders around the district to evaluate the

levels of implementation. The core tenants (Empowering Students, Valuing Diversity, Inspiring Curiosity, Pushing Possibilities) of the plan resonate strongly with me and the plan we recently completed. I believe that the current GPPSS plan ensures strong academics, meaningful assessment, collaborative partnerships and allows ample opportunities for student voice.

7. Please describe a time when you had to lead during a crisis or uncertainty and how you approached the situation.

While working in times of uncertainty and crisis are not infrequent states within a public school system, I believe it is important to establish proactive structures and systems to minimize the impact of these times on students and staff. Most recently, facing the tragic loss of a high school senior to suicide, followed by the sudden death of a beloved teacher, effective leadership during these crises was paramount. Beyond immediate response measures, my role involved providing continuous support to grieving students, parents, and staff, collaborating with neighboring districts to offer counseling services, and leading the recruitment efforts to fill the vacant teaching position. In times of crisis, leadership plays a critical role in providing stability, compassion, and strategic decision-making to guide the community through challenging circumstances. My commitment to hands-on involvement and comprehensive support ensures that the impact of crisis situations is minimized, fostering resilience and unity within the school community.

8. Do you believe there is a correlation between the success of students and increased levels of parent engagement in your district?

Absolutely. Parent engagement is foundational to student success, starting from early years and extending through adolescence and into adulthood. Actively engaged parents contribute to language development, foster curiosity, and instill a love for learning during a child's early learning years. This engagement is a continuous partnership that involves monitoring and supporting students' mental and emotional well-being in addition to their academic growth. Recognizing parents as essential educational partners establishes a collaborative environment crucial for nurturing well-rounded and successful students. Maintaining engagement of families as students grow and move through the school experience can be a challenge but the role of parents in middle school and high school is equally important. I believe school districts need to continue to build opportunities for families to be active participants in their child's development and to partner with teachers, administration and the school system as a whole. This is what makes a school system a community and a family. It's this belief that has driven the creation of our parent play dates during our incoming Kindergarten summer camp as well as our Annual Parent University events which are just a couple of our current engagement opportunities.

9. Describe your ability to cultivate a disciplined, safe and orderly school environment.

Establishing physical safety best practices is crucial, but building strong relationships based on trust is key to creating a sense of belonging for all members of the school community. Taking the time to know both staff and students individually has been a cornerstone of my leadership. I actively engage with teachers, support staff, and students, fostering open communication and understanding. This approach ensures that the school environment is not only physically safe but also emotionally supportive. Additionally, I advocate for the implementation of Positive

Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) systems, which involve establishing clear expectations for behavior, explicitly teaching these expectations, rewarding positive choices and maintaining consistent and fair consequences when violations occur. By involving stakeholders, specifically staff and students, in the development of these expectations, we create a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for maintaining a disciplined and orderly school environment. Furthermore, I support the integration of learning opportunities in core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Regular reflection, data reviews, and system revisions based on feedback ensure that our strategies evolve to best meet the needs of our school community.

10. How would you take GPPSS to being the top-ranked public-school system in the State of Michigan?

Elevating GPPSS to the forefront of Michigan's public-school systems involves continuing its already strong practices for academic and extra-curricular success while also adopting proven strategies for building on and growing success. I propose a balanced approach, combining top-quality instruction with innovative learning opportunities, ensuring students acquire both academic knowledge and essential skills for the modern workforce. Collaborative design, involving staff, students, and parents, fosters a shared commitment to creating a positive and effective learning environment. Additionally, prioritizing personalized learning experiences tailored to individual student needs is paramount. This approach, incorporating student voice and choice, cultivates a lifelong love for learning. Examining how we can better use our time to provide innovative programs and opportunities for students to excel. Creating a sense of belonging for all school community members is foundational, enhancing the overall educational experience. Furthermore, ensuring the well-being of students by addressing their basic needs and fostering a safe school environment is central to our mission. By adopting these comprehensive strategies, GPPSS can achieve excellence and provide a meaningful educational experience, preparing students for success by equipping them with the right combination of knowledge, durable employability skills and an ongoing passion and love for learning.

11. How would you increase enrollment in our school system?

To boost enrollment in GPPSS, a comprehensive strategy is essential. This includes identifying reasons for student departures through the use of exit surveys and addressing specific concerns. Taking the time to listen to our students and families and to hear both their celebrations as well as their challenges and frustrations of the district. It is the feedback and data from our families, current and former, that will help us to create unique and competitive programs to distinguish GPPSS from local alternatives.

Creating a culture of belonging and joy for all members of the school community is a priority. Learning should be joyful and fun and inspire us to wonder. Building a culture of joy and belonging creates an environment that people want to be a part of. Forging partnerships with local businesses and cultural institutions to enrich the educational experience, and bring relevance to learning for students will further create a more appealing choice. I would implement strategic marketing campaigns, leveraging social media, Youtube and community events, to highlight the strengths and achievements of our students. Finally, actively involving parents in the educational journey, fostering a sense of community and positive word-of-mouth will make us the preferred educational choice.

12. Please describe the three biggest changes to K-12 public education over the past 20 years and your thoughts on those changes.

Over the past two decades, several factors have reshaped K-12 public education. First, the profound impact of technology has revolutionized how we access information and communicate. While this has been transformative across all sectors, I believe K-12 education needs to adapt further, focusing on developing meaningful and engaging learning experiences that encompass not only academic content but also crucial skills like communication, collaboration, problem solving, innovating and critical thinking. I saw this need personally as my own children became highly disengaged with the traditional school experience in high school.

Second, the increased focus on physical and emotional safety and security for both staff and students has rightfully become a top priority. Prioritizing the well-being of our school communities ensures a conducive environment for effective and engaged learning. It's paramount for public schools to continually invest in safety measures and emotional support systems. Without ensuring our students feel safe both physically and emotionally, we lose all opportunity to help them reach their potential.

Lastly, the decline in qualified individuals pursuing teaching has significantly affected both students and school systems. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive efforts to understand and rectify the reasons behind this decline, focusing on recruitment strategies, improving working conditions, and advocating for the importance of the teaching profession within our society.

In navigating these changes, I believe that adaptability, innovation, and a strong commitment to the well-being of students and educators are imperative for fostering a resilient and effective school system.

13. How did you further academic excellence in your District?

My approach to fostering academic excellence in my current district revolves around several key principles with the most important being prioritizing building strong relationships with students and families to create a supportive learning environment. Creating a sense of belonging for all members of the school community is the foundation for all other achievements. Ensuring the well being of all community members is key. At Grosse Pointe Public Schools, my focus would be to ensure that everyone belongs and to make GPPSS the best place to learn, work and live.

Our teachers are the number one factor in student achievement. I have championed consistent and highly effective instructional practices, providing job-embedded training for teachers and establishing clear expectations based on best practices. This involves a continuous cycle of data collection and review to drive instructional decisions and improve student learning outcomes.

I emphasize student engagement by helping teachers to create meaningful learning opportunities. This includes incorporating student voice and choice into the curriculum, increasing opportunities for student-led initiatives, and providing additional resources and interventions when needed.

14. In this process, many of your failures or the failures of your District will be highlighted. How would you respond to those claims of failure?

It is understandable that as individuals begin to learn about new leadership, there could be concerns about past experiences. In response to claims of failure, I would embrace a proactive and transparent approach, acknowledging mistakes as opportunities for growth and improvement. I would openly communicate with stakeholders, offering candid insights into the challenges faced and the specific actions taken to address them. Additionally, I would underscore the importance of a growth mindset both for myself and within the district culture, emphasizing that setbacks are integral to the learning process. By fostering an environment that values transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, I would work to transform claims/concerns of failure into catalysts for positive change and resilience within the district. My approach has always been and would continue to be proactive, collaborative, and solution-oriented. By leveraging failures as opportunities for reflection and growth, we can continuously refine our strategies, ultimately contributing to the overall success and resilience of the district.

15. What aspects of this role would be the biggest challenge for you?

The role of Superintendent comes with challenges in any district and within the Grosse Pointe Public Schools System, it would expect it to be no different. Balancing budget constraints while maintaining high-quality education standards is a potential hurdle, but my strategic approach, involving efficiency reviews, stakeholder feedback, and a collaborative approach positions me to manage this challenge adeptly. Navigating the complexities of managing relationships with various stakeholders, including teachers' unions, parents, and community members, poses a significant challenge. However, my experience in collaborative leadership and transparent communication equips me to address this challenge effectively. Finally, I recognize the importance of addressing declining enrollment and the need for innovative strategies to attract and retain students in the face of competition from charter and private schools. Leveraging my background in community engagement and strategic planning, I am prepared to meet these challenges head-on, working collaboratively to ensure the continued success of the district.