

2018 SPFT Public Candidate Questionnaire

Please limit the following questions to a yes or no response.

1. The Saint Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) believes parents, educators, community members, and students should be at the center of decision making around educational policy. However, increasingly out of state millionaires with a vested interest in pursuing a corporate education reform agenda have poured money into political races with the goal of removing local voices from discussions about our children’s education.

- a. **Will you and your campaign reject contributions and independent expenditures from wealthy donors who live outside our community and from market-based education reform organizations?**

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
SHIRLEY ERSTAD	X	
AMY SCHRODER IRELAND	X	
MITRA JALALI NELSON	X	

2. Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is currently facing a budget shortfall. This is a major obstacle in closing the racial equity gap through expanding programs like restorative practices in our schools. In addition to identifying additional funding sources, SPFT believes we must ask for support from residents for our public schools in the form of a funding referendum increase in 2018.

- a. **Will you as endorse, support, and campaign for this referendum increase to benefit our public schools?**

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
SHIRLEY ERSTAD	X	
AMY SCHRODER IRELAND	X	
MITRA JALALI NELSON	X	

3. The Twin Cities has been named one of the best places to live in the country, yet many of our residents - particularly in communities of color - struggle to make ends meet, often working two or more jobs and struggling with few or no benefits. Many labor and community organizations have championed a \$15 minimum wage and earned safe and sick time, issues that affect Saint Paul staff, parents, and community members.

- a. Will you and your campaign support and endorse a \$15 minimum wage, rejecting carve-outs and tip penalties, and earned safe and sick time for all workers?

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
SHIRLEY ERSTAD	X	
AMY SCHRODER IRELAND	X	
MITRA JALALI NELSON	X	

4. Do you support collective bargaining for public sector unions and will you fight to protect them?

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
SHIRLEY ERSTAD	X	
AMY SCHRODER IRELAND	X	
MITRA JALALI NELSON	X	

Please limit your response to 150 words or fewer for each part of the questions below.

1. *What is the value of public education for you and for the city of Saint Paul?*

Shirley Erstad: An educated populous means a more stable future. We need articulate leaders with vision, creative and innovative captains of industry, resourceful and capable entrepreneurs, intelligent and empathetic educators, dedicated and understanding police officers and the list goes on. In short, a well-educated community lends itself to a more productive, happy, and healthy city, especially in today's global marketplace.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Public education is essential to a free and functioning democracy. Our public schools should be a place where people from a variety of backgrounds interact on a daily basis. As the daughter of public school teachers, a student of public schools K-12, and again as a student at a public institution for law school (U of M Law), public education is directly responsible for nearly every aspect of my life. Growing up in one of the first voluntarily desegregated school districts in Missouri (the Ferguson-Florissant school district), I learned from an early age to value and appreciate people different from myself. This is a pattern I see repeating itself in the diverse schools of St. Paul – children from a variety of backgrounds growing up together, valuing one another, and living into improved opportunities for all. Our democracy depends on the success of *all* of these children.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Public education is the heart of our communities and our democracy. In order for Saint Paul to realize its potential as a city, we need government partners at all levels who will work for students and families to get the high-quality public education they deserve. Residents make the choice to move to and stay in the city of Saint Paul in large part based on our school system, and the future of our city therefore depends on the investments we make in our public schools. The right to an outstanding public education is also fundamentally a social justice and human rights issue. I will do everything in my power as a Councilmember to support outstanding public education for all.

2. *SPPS has a diverse student population, with over 75% of students identifying as People of Color. Parents and educators agree that in order for students to be successful, we must have culturally competent curricula and educators that reflect the diversity of our city. At the same time, data shows that our city and our schools are becoming more segregated.*

a. *Segregation and poverty are harmful to all of us, especially our students and their families. How will you work to integrate our city and our schools?*

Shirley Erstad: My youngest daughter is a graduate of Highland Park Senior High. She graduated in 2014. The fall after her high school graduation, she went back to visit for an afternoon and returned home in tears. She told me that her school had completely changed because of the Strong Schools, Strong Communities plan. Having gone through the Spanish Immersion program since kindergarten, as a white person, she had always been among a diverse group of friends and was most often in the minority. Visiting Highland, she now saw far less integration than what she had grown up with.

I would work with the schools and learn from the past few years so that we can achieve more integrated schools again. I recognize the powerful benefits of being exposed to cultures other than your own and want to work towards giving all children that same exposure. Two of our daughters are bilingual and my husband and one daughter are multilingual. I would bring that global view to my work as a Council Member and my approach to our schools.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Because people of color are more likely to experience poverty than white people, and because the little affordable housing available in St. Paul tends to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods, we continue to engineer racial segregation into our city. Add practices of racially-based predatory lending, racially-based steering by realtors, and the inability of people of color to get low-interest mortgages, racial segregation is here to stay unless we address these specific practices. As we build affordable housing, we must make sure it is spread throughout St. Paul's neighborhoods. We must utilize the Community Reinvestment Act (see below) and educate people about their housing rights under the Minnesota Human Rights act and other laws to end discriminatory housing practices. When all people are truly free to live

where they choose, our city will become more integrated, and as a result, our community schools will become more integrated as well.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: As a Councilmember, I will seek to undo decades of racist housing policy that has fueled segregation by pursuing policies like upzoning and inclusionary zoning to increase our density and better fund SPPS, improve walkability and connections between and within neighborhoods, hold discriminatory landlords and realtors accountable and increase the amount of attainable and affordable housing citywide. I will also advocate for city services to be fully connected across SPPS, including accessible transit, completion of the Safe Routes to School Plan, access to parks and extracurricular programs for youth and more, so that SPPS students do not experience city services inequitably. These services help break down barriers between neighborhoods, decrease disparities and build a sense of interconnectedness citywide.

Having personally felt the sting of racial isolation in my lifetime as a Minnesotan, I am passionate about and dedicated to creating a city that works for all of us.

3. *Research shows the importance of stimulation starting at birth. Quality daycare and pre-school programs staffed by trained educators are critical to helping children to be ready for school.*

a. ***How will you partner with SPFT to ensure all families have access to quality Pre-K and early learning programs in our city?***

Shirley Erstad: I support the current efforts to establish early education for three and four year olds for all. The early years are so important for children to learn social skills, establish trusting relationships, and learn new things. By having families of very young children involved in the educational system, we can also build relationships and trust with parents and caregivers. As children grow or as family circumstances change, those relationships can help stabilize the learning environment in times of challenge and crisis at home.

The poverty rate in St. Paul is 40% and many children rely on schools for their nutrition. By working with families through early learning and pre-k, we are also helping feed their bodies as well as their minds.

Amy Schroder Ireland: As a City Councilmember, I will work with the school board and SPFT to lobby the legislature as needed, in addition to finding other funding to implement universal Pre-K education, and to implement Pre-3 education as well

Mitra Jalali Nelson: To help ensure all families have access to quality Pre-K and early learning programs, I will:

- Endorse and actively campaign for the referendum and find other resources to increase funding to existing early learning programs like ECFE

- Share information through my platform about enrollment for public pre-K and early learning programs to help increase participation and awareness
 - Work with my colleagues on the Council, School Board and at the legislature to support citywide 3-K and public funds for early learning initiatives in Saint Paul
- b. New research shows that many Minnesotans live in childcare deserts, without adequate access to childcare options for their children. How will you use your role to provide additional options early learning options for parents?***

Shirley Erstad: When my husband and I moved our young family to Saint Paul 25 years ago, we benefited greatly from Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). Our oldest was four years old and we learned about the many kindergarten options available to us. Without that resource, we would have had no idea how to navigate the elementary enrollment process.

Additionally, our four-year-old and her two-year-old sister benefitted from playing with other children as we were adapting to our new home. I learned a great deal from the educators and other parents in the parenting classes and made lifelong lasting friendships. I also volunteered in the younger sibling care room.

Resources are always limited. I would work with philanthropic partners to strengthen and support successful programs such as ECFE. I would engage the school district and the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers to advance other successful programs.

Amy Schroder Ireland: I will work with community partners, the department of health and human services, and the legislature to improve, strengthen and expand child care assistance, such as Head Start, Child Care Assistance and Transition Assistance in the city of St. Paul.

Mira Jalali Nelson: I will advocate for the expansion of Promise Neighborhood-style programs that help create high-quality and affordable childcare zones across Saint Paul for all; support and uphold city- level policies like earned sick and safe time and paid family/parental leave which are part of the set of policies that families need to fully care for their children; and work with Dr. Corrie at the agency of Planning and Economic Development to explore how we can better support high-quality community-based childcare programs as a part of our city's local economy

4. *Across the Twin Cities, more and more students are choosing to “opt-out” of standardized testing. Recent reporting by MPR, MinnPost and the Saint Paul Pioneer Press suggests that testing is costly, time consuming, and does not provide useful information for educators.*

- a. What is the appropriate use of data from standardized tests and interim assessments? What changes would you recommend? Please comment on***

the use of standardized tests and interim assessments in high stakes decisions such as school closure and staffing.

Shirley Erstad: Standardized testing is based on national norm samples of students and it's basically for comparison. There are only two benefits that I see for using these: special education eligibility and college entrance applications (one of many elements for an application). It is not right that standardized tests, like the MCAs, are used to compare schools against each other and to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher. They don't really tell teachers how students are doing specifically skill-wise. Informal assessments, such as reading inventories and the Measures of Academic Progress, do. They better inform educators about their teaching so they can be more responsive and tailor to the needs of their students.

As a college student in the 1980's, I was the sole student representative on a statewide body established by the governor to evaluate standardized tests. Way back then, as now, the concern was that high stakes decisions such as school closure and staffing should not be based on the outcomes of the testing. It was recognized early on that many factors affect student testing, including how the tests themselves are written and administered, and should only be used as one measurement.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Because studies have shown that standardized tests themselves are racially biased, I see no use for standardized tests in the classroom. Wealthier, whiter schools consistently perform better on standardized tests across the nation. I would recommend dramatically reducing, if not eliminating, standardized testing from the classroom. The results of standardized tests and interim assessments should never be used as a basis for high stakes decisions such as school closures and staffing, and should never be used as a tool for individual teacher assessment. The worst teacher in the world will still have students who perform well on standardized tests in wealthy, white communities. The best teacher in the world will still have students who perform poorly on standardized tests in communities with high rates of poverty, and large numbers of children of color, simply as a result of the type of test being administered.

Mitra Jalalai Nelson: We have to make sure that we don't base high-stakes decisions like school closures or staffing on the weight of one test alone. While standardized assessments can give us some information, they don't tell the whole story of student potential. For example, with over 140 languages spoken in SPPS but not enough EL resources, a standardized test score can unfairly penalize bilingual students. My students struggling with homelessness missed entire weeks of instruction; their scores didn't reflect what they are capable of when stably housed, and we should be doing all we can to support them. Assessment data also often isn't returned soon enough to be used meaningfully as a teaching tool, and we should make sure this is addressed. Ultimately, we have to support our schools with the resources they need to meet academic goals, and have a holistic view of what student achievement and academic progress means.

b. How will you support parents and educators in the “opt-out” movement?

Shirley Erstad: More and more parents and students are opting out of taking standardized tests. They have that right but they should also be made aware of what that decision may mean. It may affect the student’s college application later on and that information should be part of their decision- making process. In a recent news article, “Opting Out of Standardized Tests? It’s Still Legal in Minnesota” by Bright Light Small City, the legality of labeling students as “not-proficient” when opting out was questioned. I am interested in more discussions around this issue.

Amy Schroder Ireland: I will support parents and educators in the “opt-out” movement by working to make sure parents know their rights related to opting out, and to make opting out a simple and transparent process. In addition, I will work to ensure that educators and school districts are not penalized when parents choose to opt out.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Parents and educators choosing to “opt out” are working to drive a discussion about the education they feel their child deserves and to highlight negative impacts of excessive, high- stakes standardized testing, such as school closures in high-need areas and to combat deficit- based views of their students. As Ward 4 Councilmember, I would work to bring these perspectives to school board and SPPS partners in order to work toward solutions to those issues, including fighting to keep our public schools open for the thousands of students and families who depend on them, working together to ensure they are equitably funded, advocating for more holistic measures of success and a wider range of resources in schools and more.

5. *Saint Paul is home to diverse communities, including many newcomers to the United States. Public schools play a large role in helping newcomers feel welcome in their new city, while still valuing and retaining strong cultural ties.*

a. How will you use your position to prioritize support for English Learners, especially for newcomers and their families?

Shirley Erstad: All three of my daughters attended Adams Spanish Immersion Elementary School and I have a global view of education and community. As a parent volunteer in their classrooms and as a parent of children who had friends all over town from varied backgrounds, I recognize the challenges that families face when English is a second language. We need a community response to this challenge, rather than looking at it as a school issue.

I am a founding member of Saint Paul STRONG. The name stands for Safe, Trust, Responsible, Open, Neighborhoods, and Generations. It is a non-partisan community group that focuses on those key values and principles in government process. As a member of the Steering Committee for Saint Paul STRONG, I helped organize a multicultural dinner this past January for families to share a meal together and engage

in conversation. I would bring those same values and volunteer activism into the work in my position on the City Council to inform my work within community and the educational system.

Amy Schroder Ireland: The ability to communicate in English is one of the key factors in how well an individual or family acclimates to life in the United States. Learning English in a culturally sensitive way allows for autonomy, self-direction and multiple educational and employment options as an individual or family chooses their own definition of success and pursues their own version of the American Dream.

As a result, investing in high quality English-language education for students and their families, that is provided in culturally appropriate ways by trained and licensed teachers, is essential to the success of new Americans and their families. I will work with community partners and the Saint Paul Public Schools to make sure adequate English-language education is fully funded.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: We must urgently increase resources for our schools to hire more English Language Learner support staff/teachers, as well as better prepare general education teachers to support English Learner students (or, emerging bilingual students). I will campaign hard for the referendum to build on the hard-fought successes of the recent negotiating team to win even more resources for EL students. I support providing all teachers with dedicated training on strategies for EL students, and will work with the school board and legislative partners to help include this in the budget.

Increasing the number of teachers of color in our Minnesota workforce can be another way to help bridge cultural gaps and support students in feeling represented, easing the transition for learning a language through emotional and cultural supports teachers of color can uniquely provide. Ultimately, the most important investment we can make is in hiring and increasing a greater number of teachers/staff who can support English Learners so that our city can have an outstanding public education system.

I will vocally advocate for funding to support the hiring of more teachers, as well as funds to train general education teachers on English Language instruction techniques they can incorporate, so that the students across SPPS who speak over 140 languages combined can have access to an excellent public education.

b. How will you work to protect immigrant and refugee students and their families in the face of a hostile federal government?

Shirley Erstad: I wholeheartedly embrace the Saint Paul Public Schools in the decision to declare themselves as a Sanctuary school district. It is vitally important to protect students from immigration raids and not share student information with immigration officials. By doing so, the Saint Paul Public School District defends students and their right to learn in an environment that does not instill fear. It also recognizes that all

students have the right to equal access to education and will not be discriminated against based on immigration status.

Amy Schroder Ireland: The federal government has been threatening legal action against municipalities who engage in Sanctuary practices, and who refuse to deputize their local police as federal immigration agents. As a City Councilmember and former immigration attorney, I will never give in to pressure to change our Sanctuary policies or deputize our local police as a result of these threats. The courts have consistently held that it is unconstitutional for the federal government to require local governments to carry out federal duties. I fully support the creation of a local government identification document that is available to all residents of St. Paul, without regard to immigration status. I will also work with our County Commissioners to determine whether funding, similar to that available in Hennepin County, could be available to Ramsey County residents in removal proceedings.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: In my day job, I work for Congressman Keith Ellison as his immigration and refugee issues policy and outreach aide for our constituents and am eager to bring my experiences and efforts defending our communities in the time of Trump to my work as a City Councilor. I will vocally uphold the SPPS separation ordinance as well as the parallel one maintained by the City of Saint Paul, and work to increase accountability for SPPD to uphold it in practice. I have and will continue to firmly oppose county- and city-level collaboration with ICE in all forms. I also support the creation of a citywide legal defense fund, which is a top resource I hope to develop in partnership with Ramsey County so that people fighting their deportations under the crushing weight of our unjust immigration laws can have the resources they need to be fully represented.

6. *SPPS and the City of Saint Paul presently do business with institutions that engage in practices that destabilizes our community through predatory lending practices, investing in private prisons, and corporate tax avoidance. Additionally, TIF Districts (Tax Increment Financing) have been created in a way that disproportionately enrich corporations and big banks. Additionally, approximately 30% of properties, including many of the most valuable pieces of land in the city, pay no taxes to the city of Saint Paul, placing a heavy burden on our families. These practices have led to economic injustice and racial discrimination in our city.*

- a. ***How will you use your role to make sure that the largest corporations in Saint Paul pay their fair share?***

Shirley Erstad: One of the reasons I am running for City Council is because I have been active in discussions around Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for several years. A little known fact that I am trying to bring to light is that the debt service payments on our TIF districts are diverting monies from not only the property tax rolls of the city of Saint Paul, but also the school district and Ramsey County. By that formula, roughly \$9 million dollars of the debt service money would have otherwise gone to the school

district in 2017. Because the TIF districts are typically established for 20 or 25 years and when they do expire, are often rolled into other TIF projects, that is money that is not going to meet the needs of our school children and our social safety nets that the county administers.

The City Council votes on the TIF decisions, but neither the school board nor the county board get a vote. I believe this needs to be more transparent. I also believe that the city needs to be more judicious in its TIF decisions.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Saint Paul should not use TIF Districts and tax abatement as a development tool. Rather than using TIF and tax abatement to lure large corporations to Saint Paul, the city's Department of Planning and Economic Development should take a longer and more incremental approach. When a city uses TIF and Tax abatement it creates a fragile economy, one that disappears when the TIF is over or the subsidy sunsets. Saint Paul should, instead, nurture small businesses (especially immigrant-, minority- and women-owned businesses) and help them create wealth and grow. This approach to economic development is outlined on the National Center for Economic Development's website and was pioneered in Littleton, Colorado.
(<https://www.nationalcentereg.org/>)

We also need to use zoning and permits to make it difficult for large corporations to have gigantic, underutilized parking lots. Land is a scarce resource and should be developed to its highest and best use.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: The strongest strategy we can have is to approach the issue from a number of angles. Obviously advocating for direct financial support from our largest private employers has to be a top priority, but as a City Councilor I will also broaden the conversation and bring more allies and voices to the table. Housing advocates can push for corporations to support housing projects that benefit our students and families. Transportation advocates can push for corporations to support safe routes to schools projects to make our neighborhoods more walkable and safe. Trades and labor unions can push for corporations to support training programs for middle and high schoolers. I have years of experience working with partners at all levels of government to bring solutions to the table and I will be proud to bring that experience to the city council and fight for our students and families.

b. Predatory lending practices increase foreclosure rates, destabilizing families. Will you join with SPFT in calling on banks to refrain from foreclosing on homes of school age students during the school year? What steps will you take to separate the city of Saint Paul from institutions that participate in predatory lending?

Shirley Erstad: Predatory lending practices are a community problem for many reasons. I am willing to join in the discussion with banks to refrain from foreclosing on homes of school age children during the school year. I have had discussions with

current City Council members regarding the banks that the City does business with and would work towards building partnerships with lending institutions that have strong social justice goals.

Amy Schroder Ireland: YES. As a City Councilmember, I would lead the city to use the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA - a federal law written to address the systemic problems of redlining and discrimination against people of color) in negotiating plans with large banks when they request a merger or expansion, or when a bank fails its CRA exam. The institution should be required to invest in communities adversely affected by negative lending practices.

As a customer of banking services, I will lead the city to carefully screen the institutions with which it does business, and require that our primary depository institution *earns* the city's business. When requesting bonds for development projects, I will push for the requirement that Wall Street investment firms compete for our business by showing that they are not exploiting vulnerable people with predatory loans, or refusing to renegotiate underwater mortgages or set up payment plans.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Housing stability can be one of the single greatest factors that impact student success. I will absolutely join with SPFT in calling for foreclosure reforms that can support students and families. As a City Councilor, I will also push for the city to leverage its own financial assets as tools to push for better lending practices for all customers from our lenders and others.

c. Will you work with SPFT to ask Saint Paul's wealthiest non-profits to pay their fair share and institute a Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program that benefits our public schools?

Shirley Erstad: Because of my leadership role with Saint Paul STRONG, mentioned above, I have been involved in many discussions regarding the PILOT program and the Right-of-Way (ROW) Minnesota Supreme Court decision. Thirty percent of the properties within Saint Paul are tax- exempt. Much of this is due to being the Capital City. In addition to being the Capital City, Ramsey County is also the most densely-populated and diverse county in Minnesota. On top of those statistics, St. Paul has a poverty rate of 40%. Given all these facts, I would work hard to encourage non-profits to pay their fair share in order to benefit our public schools. Many of them have budgeted for those costs already, having paid for them previously under the Right- of-Way Assessments. Plus, we are a community and we all benefit from a good educational system.

Amy Schroder Ireland: YES.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Yes. I believe there is space to collaborate on this issue and that these investments are desperately needed to help our schools have the resources we

need and deserve. I will push for organizations and non-profits who benefit from our community to support the investments that will continue to make it great.

d. Will you commit to working with SPFT to seek the revenue we need to have racially equitable schools? What does this look like to you?

Shirley Erstad: Yes. I will commit to working with SPFT to seek the revenue needed to have racially equitable schools. Every school is a community and every school site has unique needs. Equity does not mean that every school gets the same things but that every school has their unique needs met so that all kids get a fair start.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Disproportionate and concentrated poverty means that we need disproportionate and concentrated funding in order to have racially equitable schools. At the state level, the per-pupil funding formula needs to be changed to properly reflect the resources needed to serve low-income students who are predominantly children of color. At the local level, not every neighborhood school should be funded and staffed in the same way. Schools with high concentrations of poverty should receive more funding than schools that do not have such concentrations of poverty. For example, there is minimal, if any, gifted and talented or music instruction provided in my daughter's school (Hamline Elementary), which has a high concentration of low income children and students of color. Meanwhile, there are wealthier schools with a much smaller percentage of low income children and students of color that have gifted and talented programs, art, and music instruction. That isn't right.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Yes. I was proud to lead the work to pass the 2012 referendum and I would be thrilled to be a leading voice in the upcoming referendum campaign again as a Councilmember to organize our city for the schools our students deserve. In my Council role, I hope to grow the amount of revenues available through pursuing policies that invest in increasing our housing/density and transit (which in turn can fuel greater density) and will strive at all times to look at city policy-making through a school equity lens. I also believe private sector partners have a role to play in supporting the schools that educate their future workforce and I would advocate for education-specific tax measures and philanthropic funds from Saint Paul's largest employers to help fill critical resource gaps in SPPS.

7. Educators want to do their best and have many great ideas and solutions for ensuring all students can be successful, but their voices are often not listened to.

a. What are your ideas to help educators, in partnership with parents and community, have a voice in education policy so that their professional expertise and deep knowledge of each student can best benefit our public schools?

Shirley Erstad: Curriculum relevant to the students at each school is vitally important in keeping students interested and engaged and helping them experience situations where

they can see themselves represented. Developing unique curriculum is one way to hear the voice of educators and build relationships within each school between the parents, students, and broader community.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Educators should have a permanent seat at the table when any government assessment of education policy takes place. If the city is assessing any aspect of St. Paul Public Schools, as a member of the City Council, I would work to make sure that educators are formally included in the assessment process. Before changes to policy are implemented, educators should be asked to analyze the current policy as well as the policy change and assess whether, in their professional opinion, the change in policy will achieve the desired result. Educators should also be asked to provide an alternative vision for achieving the desired result if they believe an alternate exists.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: We must make connecting with our elected leaders (at all levels of government) more accessible and transparent. I will work in coordination with SPFT, SPPS educators and the school board to build a strong relationship with educators in Ward 4 and across Saint Paul. I will also seek SPFT/SPPS educator input on decisions made as a City Councilor and will be a dedicated advocate for their perspectives, especially when it comes to budget development and contract negotiations. As a former teacher I know how classroom teachers have a firsthand view into many of the most pressing challenges and tremendous opportunities facing our city and I believe that incorporating and continually including/seeking educator perspectives in the policy discussion is essential to achieving equity for all.

8. *The current Secretary of Education is well known for her support of “disrupting” public education through “school choice” in the form of online learning, charter schools, vouchers, and alternative licensure.*

a. ***What is your understanding of how education reform policies affect public education?***

Shirley Erstad: Education reform policies often lack validity and are not sustained. They need to be evidence-based and responsive to real needs. Vouchers create incentives for students to be moved out of their public school system and are disruptive to the basic premise of public education.

Amy Schroder Ireland: Education reform policies allow unlicensed, non-union teachers into the classroom. They also shift public funding away from public schools, and in the most egregious cases, allow public funding into private, religious schools violating the separation of church and state.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: Reforms that I do not support include for-profit online schools, vouchers, mass charterization without very little community input which was characteristic of the school system I taught in in New Orleans, eliminating tenure and

eliminating collective bargaining for public school teachers. I want to use my position on the Council to champion broadly supported improvements to public education that our community and SPFT want and need, and to oppose unsuccessful/harmful reforms that I personally experienced as a former teacher of three years and organizer in a range of spaces within and beyond education reform. There are changes that do need to be made both in and outside of our public education system to address racial opportunity gaps and more. Unions, civil rights groups, and public school students/families hold agreements in many areas on what those changes are, such as relieving the burdens of excessive high-stakes standardized testing while maintaining reasonable teacher-driven assessments, increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce through adjusted pathways that support current emerging educators of color in attaining full training and licensure, and increasing equitable funding for our schools. SPFT, Education Minnesota and other unions statewide have been vocal in pushing for equity-based reforms, and collective bargaining is among the strongest tools we have for them to continue to do so and make sure we pass reforms that don't harm students or teachers. I hope to be a voice for these solutions on the Council where appropriate and to continue working closely with SPPS educators and SPFT to support these and other community-driven goals.

9. **NOTE: Due to a typographical error, Question 9 could have been interpreted in two ways. Both responses are listed.**

a. ***Do you support teacher licensure, and why?***

Shirley Erstad: We should have teacher licensure, just like any other profession that requires a license or certification. It validates the profession.

a. ***Do you support changes to teacher licensure, and why?***

Amy Schroder Ireland: NO. Recent changes to state teacher licensure allow less qualified and less prepared individuals into the classroom. Rather than fixing the problem of a shortage of qualified teachers, the changes will instead serve to weaken public education. Just as we would hope that the best trained and qualified doctor is assigned to treat the most difficult medical condition, we should similarly hope that the best trained and qualified teacher is assigned to the students who need the most help and support. Instead, in our current system, licensing changes will lead to the least qualified teachers being assigned to the most underserved populations, and create worsening conditions of inequality.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: I am a former teacher of color who wanted to continue teaching in her home community of Minnesota and did so for a third year in 2010, but had to do so on a variance and without a clear licensure pathway at the time that would have helped me transfer some of my existing work and credits to fully complete my Minnesota teaching license without having to start entirely over. I am glad that PELSB is now working to thoughtfully address this issue in a way that acknowledges work teachers

have done to become certified and gives them a pathway to complete this in Minnesota to our standards. I am excited about initiatives by local school districts to help paraprofessionals and other educational district staff transition to becoming fully licensed classroom teachers and creating a space for them to do this through our licensure system is a good idea. I also support making the licensure process more accessible to diverse applicants without lowering standards.

b. How will you work to protect public education?

Shirley Erstad: I am the proud parent of three children who attended public schools. As referenced in many of my previous answers, I believe a public education is a fundamental building block to a stable, happy, and healthy community. I will speak on behalf of public education whenever given the opportunity and I will work to educate others on the ramifications of our TIF funding decisions.

Amy Schroder Ireland: As a champion of public schools, I will work to lobby the legislature to restore the former teacher licensing requirements. I will fight any proposal to introduce a school voucher system into the state of Minnesota. I will also work to highlight and communicate the good work already happening in our schools to the people in the community. Too often, our media only reports on the negatives in our public schools. I will work to counteract that tendency with a section highlighting the best of our Ward 4 public schools in my newsletters to constituents.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: In 2012, I organized with the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers to pass the \$39 million annual SPPS levy. I would be honored to keep fighting for SPPS on the Council. I will work for housing policy that increases needed resources for SPPS & gives SPPS students safe, affordable homes. I will fight for increased wages, protections and benefits for working families in Saint Paul so that the destabilization of families through poverty brings is alleviated in and outside of school. I will advocate for citywide 3-K, and push for charter accountability during city zoning and approvals processes associated with charters – including opposing proposals that will not make good use of our dollars or increase quality public education in our city. Most of all, I hope to use my platform to help tell the story of SPPS and its hardworking public servants and students. As a City Councilmember, I will do my best every day to be a vocal advocate for SPPS so that we can achieve the schools our students deserve.

10. What specific steps will you take to protect the right of workers – especially public sector workers – to bargain collectively?

Shirley Erstad: I support the rights of workers, including public sector workers, to collectively bargain. I will openly voice this support. I commit to seeking representation and consultation with public sector workers' groups on decisions that impact their rights, obligations, and/or benefits. The protection of workers' rights, especially in the current climate against unions and under Education Secretary Devos, is critical.

Amy Schroder Ireland: I will oppose any effort to make Minnesota a right to work state, and will work to ensure that the City of St. Paul honors its collective bargaining agreements that it has entered into with its public sector employees. As the daughter of public school teachers, it is particularly important to me that we ensure that the city is able to pay any promised retirement benefits to its workers and protect teacher seniority.

Mitra Jalali Nelson: SPFT, Education Minnesota and other unions statewide have been vocal in pushing for equity-based reforms, and collective bargaining is among the strongest tools we have for them to continue to do so and make sure we pass reforms that don't harm students or teachers.

As a City Councilor, I will be a vocal champion for our public workers. I will fight and oppose right to work in all its forms, defend the gains that organized labor won at the city like earned sick and safe time, support SPFT as it works toward important gains in ongoing negotiations and agreements. I will share Ward 4 resident input with school board members that will strengthen SPFT's position in this process, among others.