

2019 SPFE Public City Council Candidate Questionnaire

**City Council candidate Sharon Anderson does not meet the SPFE criteria for endorsement and was not invited to participate in our screening process.**

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

1. The Saint Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) 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
Rebecca Noecker	X	

2. Despite recent increases, public education statewide is severely underfunded, and has not kept pace with inflation. Communities have increasingly been called on to make up the lack of funding by passing levies that increase property taxes for home owners, while wealthy corporations continue to receive tax cuts – allowing them to benefit from our communities without contributing to them.

**a. Will you as endorse, support, and campaign on increasing revenue that will go directly to public education funding?**

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
Rebecca Noecker	X	

3. SPFE members have indicated that they do not want to participate in Q-Comp (Quality Compensation). The core components of Q-Comp include: performance pay and salary schedule reform, teacher evaluation, and job-embedded professional development. Each Q-Comp plan must include all of the core components. The implementation of Q-Comp requires performance pay to be based on standardized test scores. This funding is dependent on action by the state legislature.

**a. Would you support moving the funding and capacity put into Tim Pawlenty’s failed teacher merit pay scheme commonly called q-comp, into equitable funding for all Minnesota districts general budget?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I decline to answer, due to a lack of information surrounding Q-comp.

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

CANDIDATE	YES	NO
Rebecca Noecker	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?

**Rebecca Noecker:** Public education is at the root of our democracy. Our ability to create a more equitable future, in which St. Paul residents of all backgrounds, races and cultures are able to thrive, understand one another and participate in our democracy, depends entirely on the success of our public education system. Our public schools and our City are based on the same premise - that we all have something to offer and that we do better when we're together.

2. An endorsement from SPFE is only given to candidates that show they are a champion for public education. We do not endorse in all races.

**a. What are your direct connections to SPPS, SPFE, and/or public education?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** After graduating from college, I taught middle school science as a Teach for America corps member in Baton Rouge, LA. During that time, as a member of the East Baton Rouge Federation of Teachers, I helped organize a union action against my principal's unfair labor practices. The action resulted in my termination from my school in my second year. My husband is currently an English teacher at Rogers High School. I work closely with SPPS faculty and staff through my work for West Siders for Strong Schools, a neighborhood organization that advocates for additional resources and support for Humboldt, Cherokee and Riverview schools. I work closely with Superintendent Gothard, school board members and SPPS staff on the Saint Paul 3K initiative, an effort to ensure that all St. Paul families have access to high-quality, affordable early learning.

**b. What is your definition of a "public education champion"?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** A public education champion is someone who believes deeply that we are all inextricably bound to one another and that our society is stronger when we have a shared foundation of knowledge and experiences and an appreciation of our differences. A public education champion promotes those beliefs through public statements and advocacy, by donating time and money to public education, and in private conversations with those who may not understand the value of our public schools.

**c. Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I ran for office because I believe the city needs to play a bigger role in the well-being of its children and young people. Our job is not only to build roads, maintain sewer lines, trim trees and approve zoning changes - it's to recognize how our decisions about land use, affordable housing, policing, parks and rec and library programming can either harm or support our children and to be constantly striving, in partnership with our schools and our educators, to do better for our kids. I share SPFE's beliefs that our persistent achievement and opportunity gaps exist because our systems are not built the right way - and that our systems can change. An endorsement from SPFE would be an honor because it would affirm my commitment to public education and to our working families.

**d. How do you envision working in partnership with SPFE? What does that look like when we disagree?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I look forward to continuing to work with SPFE through regular meetings to understand SPFE's priorities and how I can be supportive. Throughout my first term, I stayed in touch with Denise Rodriguez and then Nick Faber on issues from preK to PILOT payments. When we disagree, I will be honest about the reasons why I believe what I do and I will commit to keeping the lines of communication open. I have found in my first term that respectful, empathetic disagreement can lead to greater mutual understanding than consistently being in lock step with one another.

3. Over the past year, educators across the country have gone on strike. Just one year ago, SPFE narrowly avoided a strike by reaching a last-minute contract with the district.

**a. What have you learned from the Red for Ed Movement?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** The Red for Ed movement has shown me the power of organizing, in our digital age, to take what could have been isolated struggles for dignity in the workplace and equitable funding, and make them into a national movement. It has been inspiring to see how the movement has grown and how teachers have come together across the country to magnify the power and momentum of local strikes. I have also learned from the movement how depressingly widespread are the issues of unfunded mandates, overcrowded classrooms and under resourced schools.

**b. UTLA (United Teachers of Los Angeles) recently ended their strike. In addition to much-needed pay increases, the challenges facing their students are similar to the students of SPPS. How can you use your position to support educators, parents and students in addressing these concerns?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** As a City Councilmember, I see my role in supporting educators in these struggles as threefold. First, I can help elevate teachers' concerns through my connections with city and district leaders, to bring their ideas and their struggles into the conversations I have on a regular basis with the Mayor, the Superintendent and other influencers. Second, I can be physically present with teachers on the picket lines and in the classrooms, to use my social media channels to make their work more visible. And third, I can continue to work for policies - such as YPQA evaluations of our parks and rec programming, equitable distribution of our Youth Fund and Saint Paul 3K - that align with SPFE's values and bolster its members in the work they do with students.

4. Saint Paul Public Schools (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?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I believe that the fundamental value of our public schools is that they reflect the diversity of our society, and that they train us early on in the civic skills we need to navigate a society full of the possibility and challenge of difference. Segregation distorts that picture and reinforces the inequities that already plague our society. I see this first-hand living on the West Side where a majority of our families choose to avoid the neighborhood schools they perceive as too low-performing. I started West Siders for Strong Schools to organize my neighbors around the idea that rather than fleeing our struggling schools, we should fight for them to get the resources they need. Of course, neighborhood schools only lead to desegregation if our neighborhoods are desegregated so I am also working hard at the city level to create affordable housing in all our neighborhoods.

5. Research shows the importance of stimulation starting at birth. We know students are more successful in school when they have access to high-quality early childhood education. All students should have access to these programs, whether through our public school systems or accredited independent providers.

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

**Rebecca Noecker:** Making sure all families in St. Paul have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education is one of my top priorities. Quality early childhood education is the key to educational and economic equity, gender parity in the workplace and attracting young professionals and employers to come and stay in St. Paul. I am leading a coalition with representation from the City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County and the St. Paul Public Schools on the Saint Paul 3K effort, which is premised on the idea that the City can no longer wait for the state or the federal government to take the action needed to give all children access to high-quality early learning and preK. We're following the model of cities across the country that have created their own funding streams to make early childhood education more affordable and to incentivize the creation of new high-quality spots. SPFE's support of this initiative will be critical for Saint Paul 3K's success. I have already met with Nick Faber to discuss the effort and I hope to be able to work with SPFE membership as partners in this exciting work.

**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?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** My office partnered with a GIS class from Macalester College this semester to map childcare availability relative to the number of children living in different neighborhoods in St. Paul. While we often think of childcare deserts being largely in greater Minnesota, their research found that much of St. Paul - especially our areas of concentrated poverty - are also sorely underserved by high-quality childcare. The Saint Paul 3K initiative described above aims to address this problem by creating a new funding stream that will incentivize the creation of more high-quality childcare spots citywide.

6. The current federal Secretary of Education is well-known for her support of "disrupting" public education through "school choice" in the form of online learning, charter schools, and vouchers.

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

**Rebecca Noecker:** As I understand it, education reform is an attempt to change traditional teaching and school structures in order to hold schools accountable for success. Many education reform policies have serious weaknesses - such as an overreliance on standardized test scores, which are often biased toward white, middle-class students and which often account only for objective performance according to a grade-level standard, rather than for growth over time - a much more important measure when students begin the school year at widely varying levels of proficiency. Education reform policies are also often driven by business leaders who see education as a scientific undertaking, a form of industry that can be made more efficient by tweaking parts along the assembly line, and who fail to take into account the human factors that are so much a part of both the challenges and opportunities in our schools.

b. **What is your understanding of how charter schools differ from local public schools?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** Charter schools are publicly funded but differ from traditional public schools in that they have a specific charter, often with a particular model of education or a cultural/linguistic focus, and they are not required to accept all students, such as those with disabilities or those who need special education services. Although they were originally envisioned to be places to incubate new education models that could then be adopted more widely in the local public schools, this knowledge transfer often fails to occur. Also, although charter schools are supposed to lose their charter authorization if they fail to meet academic goals, many poor performing charter schools continue to be reauthorized year over year.

c. **Will you support a moratorium on new charter schools and charter school expansions so that a comprehensive study can be done on the impact of charters schools in our communities (including segregation, tax base, land use, and neighborhood impact)? Who would you partner with for this study? Who would you include as stakeholders?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** If it's within the City's jurisdiction to issue such a moratorium, I would support it. I am concerned about the way charter schools drain funds from public schools, about their ability to continue operating despite failing to meet the goals outlined in their charter, and the fact that charter schools often take over formerly tax-producing industrial buildings or open in areas with zoning that is incompatible with the safety of students. I imagine the University of Minnesota and the Ramsey County assessor's office would be a strong partner in this research effort and it would be critical to include SPPS parents, students, teachers and school leaders as stakeholders.

7. SPPS and the City of Saint Paul presently do business with institutions that engage in practices that destabilize our community through predatory lending practices, investing in private prisons, and corporate tax avoidance. 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?**



**Rebecca Noecker:** As the City and SPFS struggle every year to fill yawning budget deficits, it is absolutely critical that our businesses and commercial taxpayers pay their fair share. The burden should not fall unduly on our residents, especially those on fixed incomes for whom paying taxes is already a challenge. As chair of the Joint Property Tax Advisory Committee, I am in a strong position to make sure all tax-paying entities in St. Paul are pulling their weight. I'm not aware of which institutions this question refers to, but I would like to discuss this further with SPFE to see how I can help.

- b. Predatory lending practices increase foreclosure rates, destabilizing families. Will you join with SPFE 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?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** Yes. I have been working with my colleague Councilmember Dai Thao to investigate our socially responsible investment fund, through which we diversify our investments into community banks with the highest CRA ratings, to make sure it is holding those banks accountable for community-friendly lending.

- c. Will you commit to working with SPFE to seek the revenue we need to have racially equitable schools? What does this look like to you?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** Yes. I am committed to partnering with SPFE to help secure adequate funding at the state and federal levels. I would prioritize legislative advocacy at the state level to end the unjust and irresponsible burden of unfunded mandates, especially with regard to special education services.

8. Traditionally the city of Saint Paul and SPFS have had an arms' length relationship. Each has their own budget, and sphere of influence. However, the actions a city takes impacts the daily lives of students and educators, and the desire to be near quality, local, public schools is often a primary factor in how families decide where to live.
  - a. How will you seek out educator and student voice in your decision-making process? What steps will you take to invite SPFE in as a stakeholder? How will you share information with SPFE, parents and students?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I ran for City Council because I believe the City and the school district need to work more closely together to make sure all students have access to an excellent and equitable education and that all our families can thrive so that they can support their students' success. Because I began my career as an educator and a program manager at education non-profits, I was often asked during my first campaign why I wasn't running for school board. I responded that I wanted to bring my background and commitment to public education to City Hall to help the City see its responsibility for a stronger partnership with its schools. I have worked closely with SPFS students on policy change, including most recently with Youth Power students at St. Paul Youth Services to advise me on a revision to our Youth Fund ordinance. SPFE has been a constant and reliable partner on issues from Saint Paul 3K to Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) and I look forward to continuing our open communication and partnership. I make it a priority to be accessible to parents, teachers and students through my near-weekly community happy hours, coffees and Facebook virtual chats,

and I'm always happy to meet any time that's convenient, including evenings and weekends.

- b. Where do you see opportunities for city and the school district to partner? How will you invite input from SPFE, parents and students on what those partnerships look like?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I see numerous opportunities for partnership between the City and SPPS - from finding efficiencies by sharing space for youth activities to collectively working to lower residents' tax burden to ensuring that the City steps up with programming to fill the schedule gaps when SPPS shifts start times to Saint Paul 3K to affordable housing and homelessness prevention - and the list goes on. I am always looking for and open to input from all stakeholders in my Ward, which I try to elicit through the community open meetings described above. Also, the City Council is experimenting this year with a work group structure to take on systems-change issues, including those that require interjurisdictional partnerships, and I think these work groups would be a great place for formal partnership with SPFE, parents, students and other stakeholders.

9. In 2018, SPFE joined our institutional partners in calling for elected officials to engage in co-governance and people-centered democracy. As a practice, this means engaging with your partners in all areas of public work, a willingness to be held accountable to promises, and on-going, open communication.

- a. What do the terms co-governance and people-centered democracy mean to you?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** To me, co-governance and people-centered democracy mean that elected officials constantly keep in mind whom they are there to serve, that they work together with their constituents to solve issues, and that they do not see their election certificates as licenses to act independently of their constituents for the majority of their term and only become accountable again at re-election time

- b. What groups and individuals will you look to for guidance?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I work closely with many groups to stay grounded in the needs of my community - including my four District Councils, three business associations, community advocacy groups like St. Paul STRONG and more. I built a diverse coalition of supporters during my first campaign, people who care about St. Paul and want it to be its best irrespective of politics, and I often confer with them on the needs of their neighborhoods. This year, I am making a particular effort to reach out to marginalized groups by meeting with residents of public housing and building

- c. What steps will you take to make sure decisions are made with communities, instead of for communities?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** Besides building the above-mentioned relationships necessary to stay in close communication with the communities I serve, I also always strive to make government as transparent as possible so that people can easily participate in and

navigate the process. The first resolution I passed shortly after taking office in 2016 changed our voting procedure at the Council table. We now vote by saying “aye” and “nay” instead of the previous procedure in which our names were read off in a confusing and lightning-fast roll call while everyone sat silently and somehow still voted “yes”. This brings us into alignment with the method of voting familiar to most people and makes it easier for people to follow our meetings. I’m also working with Ramsey County and several of my Council colleagues to change the murals in our Council Chambers to make sure everyone feels welcome and at home in that space.

**d. How will you separate your accountability to the public good you’re your personal feelings?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** I believe it’s the responsibility of every elected official to put the public good above one’s own personal preferences. That’s why we’re in office and why we make the personal sacrifices we do to be here. That said, the problem I encounter more frequently is that both my personal feelings and my constituents’ opinions are divided on an issue, and the ultimate public good is unclear. In those cases, I do my best to gather as much information as I can, to think through my options as clearly as I can and to make the best decision for the greatest number of people as possible.

**10. What specific steps will you take to protect the right of workers – especially public sector workers – to bargain collectively? How will you encourage all workers to be part of a union, should they choose to?**

**Rebecca Noecker:** As a former union member married to a union member, I feel strongly about the need to protect workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively. I believe that most of the gains the middle class has made in the last century have been due to organized labor and that the growing inequality in our country is largely due to a decrease in labor’s power in the last several decades. I will uphold our City’s prevailing wage and labor compliance laws and seek to add additional “teeth” to those laws so that contractors who attempt to skirt the rules are held accountable. I will meet with SPFE and other unions to understand their concerns and do whatever is within my power to help resolve them. By using my public voice to support workers’ rights, including to amplify their voices during a strike, I hope to show others that being part of a union is honorable, desirable and a way not only to improve one’s own working conditions but to uphold our democracy.