

## 2023 SPFE Public City Council Candidate Questionnaire

**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?**

**Yes**

2. Despite recent increases, public education statewide is severely underfunded, and has not kept pace with inflation. Currently, the DFL holds the House, the Senate, and the Governor's office, and has proposed a massive increase in education spending, including indexing education funding to inflation.

- a. **Will you endorse, support, and campaign on fully funding our public schools?**

**Yes.**

3. **Do you support a moratorium on all new charter schools opening in St. Paul as well as a moratorium on any expansions of charter schools already in St. Paul?**

**Yes.**

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

**Yes.**

**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?***

Public education is a community good and a human right. Teachers equipt with robust programs and resources can disrupt inequitable outcomes in health and wealth. Working families rely on our teachers and school resources to prepare their children for higher education. Divesting from our already strained education system is stealing from our future community and stealing unactualized potential.

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?***

I am fortunate to have relationships with public school teachers, in and out of the district, school board members, and both former and current SPPS students. My Campaign Manager is a 2020 graduate from Como High School. I attended public school from Pre-K to 12th grade. My nieces and nephews are students at Saint Anthony Park and soon-to-be JJ Hill Pre-Kindergarten.

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

A public education champion **trusts** educators and students when they share concerns about our schools. A public education champion fights for:

- resources to pay educators what they deserve
- decrease teacher-to-student ratios
- multilingual student success
- increased funding for special education
- mental health and social services
- expanded after school programs and summer education offerings

Someone who works in partnership with the greatest assets in our education system: our teachers and students.

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

Earning the SPFE endorsement is a testament to progressive values for candidates in Saint Paul. SPFE is rooted in our shared belief that our schools' success determines our city's and communities' success. With many educators in my life, I am excited by the opportunity to screen. I also look forward to expanding my relationships with more teachers and students in the Ward because of SPFE.

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

Collaboratively, co-governing with - not *for* the community, with open and proactive lines of communication and transparency through honesty. When we disagree, I hope we both have the opportunity to hold complexity together, regroup in our values, and help each other recenter and honor our relationship.

3. The rampant growth of charter schools in the city of Saint Paul has caused great harm to our public schools and our communities. Per the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) the, the [number of charter school programs has grown to 81](#) in just the city of Saint Paul. This rise has led to the [resegregation of schools and communities](#), and includes a Saint Paul charter school that has been [under investigation since 2019](#) for investment practices.

**a. Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) recently made the decision to close or combine several schools due to declining enrollment. Out of control growth of charter schools has led to the disastrous result of more “seats” available than there are school-age children in the city. Unlike charter schools, SPPS must be available to serve all children. What is the role of the City Council in supporting SPPS?**

I support finding ways to halt new charter schools from establishing themselves in Saint Paul through bonding, zoning, or licensing. I will build stronger partnerships with SPPS and Parks and Recreation, Libraries, with afterschool programs in an effort to identify strengths and gaps in our youth programs across the city.

I will support systemic change at the legislature. While I don't support having two school systems funded by the state and municipalities, in the interim, I am committed to identifying areas where we can move for accountability across the charter system. Things like mandating oversight requirements as public schools and disclosing student attrition and enrollment information. We deserve greater transparency in determining which charter schools are for-profit and their financial stewardship.

- b. Saint Paul Public Schools provides more than classroom education for students and families. Robust, well-funded public schools help to create stable communities, increased property values, and play a vital role in desegregating our city. What specific steps will you, as a member of the City Council take to slow charter school growth AND support enrollment in SPPS?**

I support a moratorium on publicly funded charter school expansion. I will seek out opportunities to partner with SPPS and their efforts in supporting and expanding Pre-K and early education opportunities for our littlest learners. Great work is happening with the Enrollment Committee and SPPS leaders around incentivizing enrollment. I am excited to find ways to support their work in Ward 5 and outreach to our neighborhoods.

- c. Will you advocate and support a comprehensive study on the impact of charters schools in our communities (including segregation, tax base, land use, and neighborhood impact) and steps to address the harms done by unchecked charter school growth? Who would you partner with for this study? Who would you include as stakeholders?**

Yes. Teachers, SPFE, students, families, City Council Members, School Board Members, Legislators, and organizations that can provide research support.

4. The COVID pandemic will have a long-term impact on the city of Saint Paul. In addition to loss of life, many of our social safety nets were brought to the breaking point. Many people, especially our students, are still dealing with the after-effects, including disrupted learning, mental health crises, and financial losses. Essential workers, once lauded by lawmakers for staffing our hospitals, keeping our schools going, our cities running, and our grocery stores open are now facing criticism for rising costs – while corporations made some of the highest profits ever seen.

- a. One of the biggest challenges our community faces is the lack of access to reliable, high-speed internet and devices – this existing challenge was exacerbated during COVID. What steps can the City Council take to make free, high-speed internet available across the city?**

In this digital age, the ability to access affordable and reliable high-speed internet is leaving kids and families behind. There is a stronghold with Comcast and Century link that results in no other internet options for families. I know other cities have concerns regarding the monopoly and advocate for affordable and reliable internet options. In lieu of taking on corporate monopolies, I am motivated to provide hot spots to families with school-aged children, perhaps with an income qualifier. Or even partner up to figure out how to offer citywide broadband like Monticello, MN.

- b. It is possible that we will experience another pandemic. What actions can the City Council take now, to prepare for that possibility? How will you protect and support the public sector workers that keep our city functioning during a public health crisis?**

LiUNA!, AFSCME, SPFE workers kept our city running in its most crucial moment of need. I received my first vaccination at Oxford Rec and my second at Arlington Hills. Right now, we can pass health-centered policies like providing Paid Family Leave citywide and revisit the enforcement of Earned Sick and Safe Time. Being able to take time off when you are sick or caring for a loved one reduces burn out and when you can take paid time off to quarantine, it makes all of us safer.

City leaders learned a lot about the needs of the public sector workers and I will work to create additional feedback loops so decision-makers have continuous live feedback. There are opportunities for the union stewards to meet with our St. Paul Ramsey County Public Health department and work to co-create policies that protect workers and focus on prevention and protection. We also should revisit the pay of frontline workers to ensure they are adequately compensated for additional work requirements to keep our communities safe while they enjoy city facilities and programs.

5. Saint Paul, like many cities, is struggling to balance the increased needs of community against increasingly tight budgets. The solution has often been increases in property taxes and fees. Mayor Carter is currently [seeking a sales tax increase](#) to help cover the cost of necessary improvements to our roads and parks. While Saint Paul residents are often willing to take on the additional financial burden to care for our city, many are at the financial breaking point, this system is ultimately unsustainable, and has the most damaging financial impact on our citizens that can least afford it.

**a. Wealthy corporations saw some of their largest profits during the pandemic, while our residents struggled financially. Will you encourage the City Council to revisit the use of PILOTs (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) to ease the tax burden on our residents? Will you support a percentage of a PILOTs to be dedicated to funding SPPS? What steps will you take as a City Council member to pursue PILOTs?**

Yes. Yes. Create a workgroup with stakeholders and draft ordinances for consideration.

**b. TIF districts are used by the city to spur development. TIF districts also result in less funding for SPPS and the city. It is also often unclear on how some projects meet the “But for” test. What are your ideas on how the use of TIF can be restructured to minimize the financial impact on our school district and community, and still support growth?**

If TIF is being used, one option could be requiring developers to pay the portion of taxes that would go to our schools based on the original tax rate. Another could consider a rule allowing schools to capture taxes from developers based on the current tax rate, regardless of the contract year. We also must continue to support development that expands our tax base and find ways to rely less on TIF to build large-scale affordable housing. Finally, greater clarity on decision-making around projects that pass the “But for” test so that our community stakeholders have transparency on why.

6. Traditionally the city of Saint Paul and SPPS 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?**

I am looking forward to shadowing educators meeting with student council members and building relationships I can lean and rely on. Both for matters regarding SPPS and just matters that impact Saint Paul families. We don’t know each other well, but I am committed to finding

ways we can weave educator and student experiences in policy making. I always hope for open communication to exchange ideas and co-create solutions together. I will actively seek out your expertise and ask that you, too, reach out to me whenever you need. I will share information openly and transparently and ask for that in return.

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

A touchstone that I return to in personal and political work is: those most impacted are not subjects but are experts and should be trusted to offer solutions. Partnering would focus on cultivating relationships with teachers, students and their families. Aside from political relationships, students and their families are the most critical connection between the city and the district. I would like to work with SPFE, meet with teachers in the ward, and strive to meet with students personally and find ways to connect regularly.

In the Ward, we have broken ground on the North End Community Center right next to the Rice Street Library, which all faces Wellstone Elementary. This campus of services and the staff have an opportunity to build something integrated with SPFE.

7. 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?***

Co-governance is a practice of decentralizing power and saturating decision-making in the community, not just with other electeds. It relies on relationships with people who are grounded in shared values and share space to strategize and have thought partnership. It is articulated by the continual engagement that doesn't prescribe to "on and off" years. People-centered democracy means residents most impacted by the issues and solutions to participate without barriers.

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

Teachers, students, parents, school board members, communities of culture, youth, elders, LGBTQIA2S+, unions, other elected officials, engaged neighbors, and District Councils.

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

Being accountable means that I listen to a diversity of voices, not just cherry-pick the ones that align with my perspective, dig into the details and nuance, hold complexity, and move through differences with awareness and empathy. As an organizer and coalition builder, it's hard for me to imagine moving through spaces and wielding power, not centering collective decision-making.

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

My values and experiences drive my feelings. When I think of who is included in the public good, I am explicit regarding who benefits from my accountability. That means we are clear on centering communities of color, our immigrant, working class, and LGBTQIA2S+ communities.

So separating my personal feelings is hard because I want systems and leaders to be accountable to folks and communities like mine. However, my feelings may not be informed on issues that do not impact me personally. When that happens to be accountable to those most harmed and impacted is more important than my personal feelings. It is critical to contextualize issues to history and how our decision moves us closer to a just world for the public good.

**8. 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?**

Collective bargaining helps ensure safe and quality working conditions and lifts up working families. Achieving workplace democracy is a tool and value; we must have every voice represented and emphasize we are bargaining for people's well-being. We, as a city, are responsible for coming to the table respectfully, prepared, and operate in good faith with union representatives during negotiations. Anyone who wants to be in a union should be able to. My father-in-law was a long-time union steward, and I see firsthand how his union stabilized his family, and gave them health benefits, a pension, and a salary to raise his family and save for the future. I will always encourage folks to join a union because I am lucky to be a part of a union family.