

2026 SPFE Public BOE Candidate Questionnaire

1. The Saint Paul Federation of Educators believes that parents, educators, community members and students should be at the center of decision-making around educational policy. However, there has been an increase in money from out-of-state millionaires with a vested interest in pursuing a corporate education reform agenda and 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	NO
John Bjoraker	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Stephanie Anderson	X	
Tamara Mattison	X	

2. SPFE engages in open bargaining, encouraging SPFE members and community members to attend and witness bargaining with SPPS.

a. ***Will you commit to participating in bargaining sessions?***

	YES	NO
John Bjoraker	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Stephanie Anderson	X	
Tamara Mattison	X	

3. In an effort to force compliance with a number of abhorrent, hateful policies, the federal government is threatening to withhold funds from our public schools. Additionally, the current state funding for public education is woefully inadequate to meet student needs, and all across the state, public school districts are being forced to make cuts. The lack of adequate funding has resulted in the need for districts across the state to seek funding referenda in the recent election.

a. ***Will you endorse, support, and campaign on increasing funding for public education, even if it means increasing taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations?***

	YES	NO
John Bjoraker	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Stephanie Anderson	X	
Tamara Mattison	X	

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

	YES	NO
John Bjoraker	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Stephanie Anderson	X	
Tamara Mattison	X	

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

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

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

John Bjoraker: The value of public education is deeply personal to me. As a lifelong resident of Saint Paul and a proud graduate of Saint Paul Public Schools, public education shaped who I am and made it possible for me to learn, grow, and lead in this city I love. I believe access to a strong public education is one of our most important rights, and it was and is my moral responsibility to give back to the school community that invested in me. That commitment led me to serve as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal, roles that allow me to support students and educators as they reach their full potential. I have seen firsthand how strong public schools create opportunity, foster belonging, and strengthen communities. For Saint Paul, public education is the foundation of a strong and thriving future. Our schools anchor neighborhoods, support families, and help every child feel safe, included, and valued.

Omar Syed: Public education changed my life. I came to this country as a refugee with nothing and went to public school here at Arlington High School. It gave me a foundation, stability, and a path forward. For Saint Paul, public schools are where kids from all backgrounds come together to learn. They are the most important investment we make in our future.

Stephanie Anderson: I grew up in public schools and have two kids in SPPS. Public education plays a tremendous role in the shaping and future of our community, country and world. Today's SPPS students will be our teachers, doctors, tradespeople, community leaders, etc. of the future, and we need to invest in our students and our public schools in order to have a healthy St. Paul Community now and in the future. I take Paulo Freire's expansive view of literacy as reading the world. Schools teach kids how to read their world. And, when they read their world as inaccessible, inequitable or unjust, public schools can provide students the tools they need to change it. Public schools should foster kids' creativity and capacity for dreaming and prepare students for their future as citizens of their communities with agency, confidence and a strong sense of justice.

Tamara Mattison: When public education serves students from every neighborhood, culture, and language background, reflecting the diversity and resilience of our city its value is in the success of its students. When SPPS is strong, families are supported, communities are stabilized, and students are prepared not only for college and careers, but for civic life. Public schools are often the most consistent and trusted public institution in a child's life, providing academic learning alongside essential services such as meals, special education, language support, and mental health resources. Investing in SPPS is an investment in Saint Paul's workforce, democracy, and shared future. A thriving public school system ensures that opportunity is not reserved for a few, but extended to all students, regardless of background or circumstance.

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

John Bjoraker: My connection to Saint Paul Public Schools is both personal and professional. I am a proud graduate of SPPS, having attended Parkway Elementary School, Battle Creek Middle School, and Harding High School. These schools shaped who I am and instilled in me a deep commitment to public education and community service. Professionally, I have dedicated the last 17 years to serving SPPS students and families. I began my career in 2008 as a 3rd-grade teacher at Maxfield Elementary School, where I was a part of SPFE. I continued to serve SPPS as an Assistant Principal at the Heights Community School and Principal of Farnsworth Aerospace Lower Campus and EXPO Elementary School. SPPS is my home, my profession, and my lifelong commitment.

Omar Syed: I attended public school after coming to Saint Paul, my wife went to public school, and my children are in public schools today. As a parent, I see the system up close every day.

Stephanie Anderson: We have been an SPPS family since my oldest started pre-K at Wellstone. My son is now finishing his last year at Highland Park Middle and my daughter is a fifth grader at Global Arts Plus. I was a lead organizer of the Save Wellstone Elementary campaign. I am on the PTA at GAP and the chair of the HPMS Parent Solidarity Network, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that I created. I have been a champion for SPFE throughout my years in the District, supporting strike planning, speaking at rallies and even appearing in a promotional video! Most recently I have been very involved in the SPPS Parent Solidarity Network as a parent lead at HPMS and region lead in Region 6. I also set up the district-wide fundraiser that has raised more than \$400,000 for SPPS families in need of housing assistance.

Tamara Mattison: My daughter attended Como Park High School and graduated in 2008, where I was a cheer leading coach for 2 years. I was the restorative practitioner at Washington Tech from 2017- 2018, and when my granddaughter was in first grade both my daughter and I returned to Como Park to coach cheerleaders from 2016-2025. My granddaughter attended Como Park High School her Freshman and Sophomore year while cheering for the 9 years we ere coaches.

c. How will you demonstrate that you are a “public education champion”?

John Bjoraker: I care deeply about public education because my lifelong experience as both a student and an educator in Saint Paul Public Schools has shaped my values and my commitment to ensuring every child has access to a safe, inclusive, high-quality education I will demonstrate that I am a public education champion by leading with experience and listening with heart. I will advocate for decisions that center students, support educators, and strengthen partnerships with families and the community. I am committed to fiscal responsibility, transparency, and thoughtful stewardship of public resources, because trust matters. Being a champion for public education means showing up, listening, and doing the work, every day, to ensure our schools remain strong, welcoming places where all students can thrive.

Omar Syed: I will listen to educators, support them, and stand up for the resources our schools need by advocating for increased funding at the capitol and pushing back against charter school outsourcing. I will stay connected to families and make sure decisions reflect what’s really happening in our schools.

Stephanie Anderson: One specific way I will demonstrate that I am a public school champion is by learning about and advocating for policy to move SPPS toward a full-service community school district. We have a St. Paul community that is activated and understands that we all have a role to play in the health, safety and success of SPPS. We must work with SPFE and school site councils (for schools where there is no site council, we need to address the barriers to the formation of one) to get those critical stakeholders on board with a full-service model. Collaboration with our partners at the city and county, as well as the state, to share information and resources is also key. Finally, I will research models within SPPS that we can build on as well as looking at other districts (Brooklyn Center) and states (Maryland) that have adopted the full-service community school model.

Tamara Mattison: My 30+ years in community service through running youth programs in both Minneapolis Public Schools and Saint Paul Public schools. Also have provided youth programming in ISD 621, ISD 622, and ISD 623 over the past 10 years makes me a champion in public education.

d. Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?

John Bjoraker: I am seeking endorsement from the Saint Paul Federation of Educators because SPFE represents the voices of the educators who do the work of public education every day. As a former SPFE member and a lifelong SPPS educator, I deeply value the role the union plays in advocating for students, educators, and strong public schools. My career as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal has been grounded in partnership with educators, respect for professional expertise, and a belief that strong schools are built through collaboration. I am seeking SPFE's endorsement because I want to continue working alongside educators to ensure schools are safe, inclusive, well-resourced, and places where both students and staff can thrive. I would be honored to have their trust and support.

Omar Syed: Educators are at the center of our schools. Their support means a lot because they understand what students need every day. I want to work with educators and earn their trust.

Stephanie Anderson: don't know that there is an endorsement more important to me than that of SPFE. I have so much respect for and am so proud of the educators in St. Paul Public Schools who are on the ground, doing the work, every day. My kids are so loved and so cared for at their schools, and it would mean so much to me to have the support of the people who make that happen.

Tamara Mattison: I am seeking endorsement from SPFE because the organization is a trusted and principled advocate for educators, students, and strong public schools in Saint Paul. SPFE's commitment to equity, student learning conditions, and respect for educators aligns closely with my own values and priorities for Saint Paul Public Schools. An endorsement from SPFE signals a shared belief that decisions about our schools should be guided by those closest to the work such as educators, students, families, and community partners grounded in collaboration and transparency. I value SPFE's willingness to advocate boldly for public education while engaging in thoughtful dialogue, even when perspectives differ. I am seeking this endorsement not only as a statement of support, but as a commitment to ongoing partnership, listening, and accountability in advancing the success and well-being of SPPS students and staff.

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

John Bjoraker: Partnership and connection are absolutely essential in the relationship between the Board and SPFE. I see SPFE as a critical partner in the shared work of supporting students and strengthening Saint Paul Public Schools. That partnership begins by grounding our relationship in our shared mission and vision, and in a mutual commitment to student success, educator support, and strong public schools. Working in partnership means being intentional about communication, respecting our distinct roles, and engaging in collaborative problem solving. It also means inviting SPFE into conversations early, listening to educator expertise, and valuing the perspectives of those closest to the classroom. When we disagree, as partners sometimes will, I believe it's important to approach those moments with transparency, honesty, and respect. Disagreement should not weaken relationships but deepen understanding, with a focus on solutions that support educators and students alike.

Omar Syed: I see SPFE as a partner. That means regular communication, listening, and being honest. When we disagree, I will still show respect, be open to conversation, and find common ground. We must build a relationship of mutual trust and respect to best serve the students together.

Stephanie Anderson: Relationships are key to successful partnerships. I will continue to build on the relationships I have with SPFE leaders and members. As a school board member, I will lead with transparency and an open mind. I will always model and encourage honest dialogue about needs and goals and how we can work together, even when we have disagreements, to decide how to use our limited resources in fair and effective ways that move SPPS in the direction we want it to go. Both during my campaign and when I was campaigning for the Vote Yes referendum, I have heard from educators who were so happy and relieved to have settled a contract in the summer. This shows that effective co-governance is possible.

Tamara Mattison: Partnership looks like transparency around goals and constraints, a shared commitment to equity and student success, and a willingness to collaborate on solutions that strengthen Saint Paul Public Schools. When disagreements arise, partnership means addressing them honestly and respectfully listening before responding, grounding discussions in shared values, and keeping students, educators, and families at the center of decision-making. I believe disagreement can be productive when it is rooted in mutual respect and a common purpose. Working with SPFE means

showing up consistently, being accountable, and treating the relationship as an ongoing collaboration, not a transactional one.

2. Like other districts in Minnesota, SPPS is facing tightening budgets. In 2021 SPPS made the decision to close and/or merge some schools under [Envision SPPS](#). This process was not transparent, and did not seek community engagement from the start, instead choosing to simply inform parents and community after the decision was made. This year, SPPS begins a new cycle of [strategic planning](#), and once again, difficult decisions may need to be made.

a. How will you, as a potential incoming board member in 2027 engage in the Strategic Plan process (including community engagement) as a community member while you run for office?

John Bjoraker: Community must be at the center of all decisions impacting our schools, especially during moments of significant change. As a potential incoming Board member, I would engage in the Strategic Planning process as an active community member by listening early, often, and in multiple settings, long before decisions are finalized. I would work closely with the Superintendent and her team to advocate for a clear, transparent, and inclusive community engagement plan with defined expectations, timelines, and accountability. That includes ensuring engagement happens at the front end of the process. I believe Board materials, updates, and presentations should clearly document how community feedback informed the work, where themes emerged, and how input influenced recommendations. I would also encourage using accessible engagement strategies that meet families where they are, across neighborhoods, languages, and schedules, so participation is broad and meaningful. Trust is rebuilt when people see their voices reflected in decisions, especially during difficult conversations.

Omar Syed: Last time the community was brought in too late. That can't happen again.

While I'm running, I will show up to public engagement meetings and take part in surveys the district puts out. I will also talk directly with families, educators, and school workers and help their voice be heard.

I want a strategic plan that makes sure our public schools better serve all communities, especially immigrant communities. I've seen how families can feel disconnected, and I want to help close that gap. I'm also focused on school funding and the impact of resources being pulled away from public schools.

Stephanie Anderson: I will talk to constituents about the Strategic Plan, as it is possible that many people may not have heard about it. I will bring feedback from the community to my friends on the Board and will pay attention to the actions of the Board between now and July 2026 when the Strategic Plan is set to be adopted. Something that stands out to me in the plan is the piece about Sustainable Infrastructure. I understand the importance of this and, having been a Wellstone family during Envision I understand the trauma, fear and uncertainty that comes with the proposal to close a school. I will approach difficult decisions like those around sustainable infrastructure from a place of lived experience and care and am committed to transparency, collaboration with all stakeholders and looking for creative solutions to difficult problems.

Tamara Mattison: I have served in community engagement in St Paul for over 20+ years with churches, small businesses, families, and providing restorative trainings through the Minnesota Department of Education over the past 5 years. I am a leader who has been successful in transforming systems through relationship building and engaging stakeholders who don't see things through the lens from which my experience sees things yet arriving at a shared destination where it is a win-win. My community reach spans wide, so I know that the support I have from the families I've served with see me as the trusted messenger I am. My 30-year financial background in Corporate America, Higher Education, Non-profit management, and 14-year board finance chair for a charter school has grounded me in strategic planning across many different sectors.

3. Urban districts across Minnesota are facing declining enrollment due to both declining birth rates and [unchecked charter school proliferation](#). Declining enrollment means less funding for SPPS. (Please be as detailed as possible in your responses).

a. What specific steps will you take to end charter school growth in Saint Paul?

John Bjoraker: As a School Board member, there are meaningful actions we can take to address this issue responsibly. This includes advocating at the Legislature for stronger accountability and policies that protect districts from destabilizing funding

losses. I would also push for greater transparency so families and policymakers understand how enrollment shifts affect district resources, equity, and student outcomes. At the same time, I believe the most immediate and powerful strategy is investing in Saint Paul Public Schools as the district of choice. By strengthening safety, academic quality, staffing stability, and family trust, we can retain and attract students while advocating for fairer statewide policies.

Omar Syed: The school board has already commissioned a study on how charter growth is impacting SPPS. I would use those results to push for a moratorium on new and expanding charter schools at the state level. We are losing resources, and that weakens our public schools.

Stephanie Anderson: I know that the St. Paul School Board has commissioned a study to assess the impact of charter schools on our city. I will pay close attention to the results and use them to advocate for a moratorium on charter school growth in St. Paul. I know that it is the state legislature that would have to pass a moratorium, but I am committed to working with our state legislators to make sure they have a complete understanding as to why a moratorium is necessary.

Tamara Mattison: This isn't about charter vs. public schools, it's about whether every child gets a quality education. In Saint Paul, outcomes vary dramatically from school to school. That's the problem we need to solve."

b. What are your plans to increase enrollment in SPPS district wide?

John Bjoraker: Increasing enrollment in SPPS will take a team effort and a shared commitment from everyone who believes in and supports our public schools. As a Board member, I would focus on doing my part to help make SPPS a district families actively choose and want to stay in.

That starts with promoting the strengths of our district, the great work happening in classrooms, the dedication of educators, and the unique programs that make SPPS special. I would show up at community events, listen to families, and help share positive, accurate stories about our schools. I also believe enrollment work must include strong retention and recovery strategies. That means understanding why families leave, addressing those concerns honestly, and creating welcoming, safe, and consistent school experiences so students want to stay. By partnering with families, educators,

community organizations, and district leadership, the Board can help rebuild trust, strengthen relationships, and support sustainable enrollment growth across SPPS.

Omar Syed: I support the work of the Enrollment and Retention Committee, and I would make sure it has the support and funding it needs. That work matters.

We also have to win back trust. We need to make our schools better with well-supported educators and strong programs. I want to make sure our schools better serve all communities, especially immigrant families like mine, to make it easier to choose SPPS.

Stephanie Anderson: I will advocate for funding and other support for the Enrollment and Retention Committee to do their work. In addition board members should be out in the schools in their area talking to current families and asking them why they chose SPPS *and* why they stay. I also think the Board should direct District administration to conduct exit interviews. We need to know what made a family choose SPPS in the first place and why they are leaving. In that exit interview it would also be helpful to know about any interventions done to address issues a family may have identified prior to their decision to leave. This final piece should be done not for punitive reasons but rather to give the District data as to what measures resonate with families who may be struggling with a decision to stay in SPPS.

Tamara Mattison: In our district, some schools have over 60% of students proficient, while others are closer to 15%. That's a 50-point gap inside the same system—that's not equity. The district average—about 35% reading and 27% math hides how wide that gap really is. Parents don't experience averages—they experience individual schools therefore, until we fix the infrastructure causing underperformance why would we add more students on a foundation that's not strong enough to hold them? Once we see the changes needed to strengthen our schools' families will come. If you build it, they will come!

4. Recently the SPPS Board of Education developed a new governance model, [Board Instituted Goals Governance \(B.I.G.G.\)](#). This model prioritizes SPPS Board of Education engagement in developing and determining district priorities, as well as criteria for evaluating the Superintendent.

a. What do understand the role of School Board member to be? (Please be as detailed as possible)

John Bjoraker: I understand the role of a School Board member to be one of governance, accountability, and vision setting, not day to day management. Under the Board Instituted Goals Governance (B.I.G.G.) model, the Board's responsibility is to establish clear, student centered priorities for the district and define how success will be measured. This includes adopting Board approved goals that reflect community values, equity commitments, and long term academic outcomes. A School Board member must also partner with the Superintendent by setting clear expectations, using defined criteria to evaluate progress, and ensuring strategic alignment between district actions and Board goals. Equally important is engaging with students, families, staff, and the broader community to listen, communicate transparently, and make informed decisions. Effective governance requires discipline: staying focused on outcomes, being a responsible steward of public resources, and maintaining a clear distinction between governance and administration.

Omar Syed: The role is about setting priorities for the district and holding the Superintendent accountable to those goals. The board should not be a rubber stamp. It should be active, ask questions, and make sure decisions are serving students, families, and educators.

However, the board is not there to manage day-to-day operations. It's about direction, oversight, and involving the community in decisions.

Stephanie Anderson: A school board member is a representative who brings the voice of the educators, staff and community to the table. They are leaders who set district priorities and goals and make sure policies reflect the input of all stakeholders about what they want and need from the schools as well as provide oversight to make sure ethical and legal obligations are met. The Board holds district administration accountable to meet the goals that it has identified through careful consideration and extensive community outreach. Finally, a school board member should be known by their community. This is done by showing up to a variety of schools, school and community events and being responsive when a stakeholder reaches out directly.

Tamara Mattison: The role of the Saint Paul Public Schools School Board is to provide governance, vision, and accountability for the district in service of students and the broader community. The Board sets policy, approves budgets, hires and evaluates the superintendent, and ensures that district decisions align with SPPS's mission, values,

and equity commitments. Board members do not manage day-to-day operations; instead, they focus on long-term strategy, oversight, and community representation. A strong School Board listens to students, families, and educators, makes transparent and informed decisions, and holds the system accountable for student outcomes, fiscal responsibility, and equitable access to opportunity. Ultimately, the Board's responsibility is to steward public trust and ensure that Saint Paul Public Schools serves all students effectively and fairly.

b. What does healthy board governance look like to you?

John Bjoraker: Healthy board governance means a board that is focused on outcomes, grounded in trust, and grounded in diverse perspectives. A healthy board sets clear goals, understands its governance role, and holds leadership accountable without stepping into day to day operations. It prioritizes respectful dialogue, thoughtful decision making, and transparency with the communities it serves. From my experience as a prior member of the AMAZEworks board, I've seen firsthand how important representation and a diversity of lived and professional experiences are to strong governance. When people with different backgrounds, identities, and viewpoints are genuinely included, boards make better, more equitable decisions. Healthy boards create space for constructive disagreement, listen deeply, and value perspectives that may challenge the status quo. Strong governance also requires clarity of roles, mutual accountability, and a shared commitment to the mission of the Saint Paul Public Schools. Ultimately, a healthy board leads with integrity and respect, knowing that how decisions are made matters just as much as the decisions themselves.

Omar Syed: Healthy governance means collaboration, transparency, and respect. People can disagree, but you work through it and stay focused on students.

It also means involving the community in decisions early, not after the fact.

Stephanie Anderson: A healthy board works to build consensus and mutual respect between all stakeholders in SPPS: educators, staff, families, communities, administration, and the broader community. The Board sets policy that will move the District forward for the future and has the ability to be flexible to change if a certain goal no longer makes sense. The Board must be visible to the community, which is something that I think we can always improve upon, and must make decisions with the community's input. In these outreach efforts, the Board takes the time to listen to the community as well as discuss what it will look like for the community and what they will need if / when the Board must make a decision that will be unpopular with the community.

Tamara Mattison: Healthy school board governance is grounded in clarity of roles, shared purpose, and respect for professional expertise. A strong board focuses on vision, policy, and accountability—setting clear goals for student success and equity while entrusting day-to-day operations to the superintendent and staff. Effective governance is transparent, data-informed, and responsive to community voices, especially students, families, and educators, most impacted by board decisions. Healthy boards work collaboratively, engage in open and respectful dialogue, and manage disagreement without personal conflict or political posturing. When governance is healthy, trust grows, systems function more effectively, and schools are better positioned to serve all students well.

c. How will you build a working relationship with current SPPS Board of Education members?

John Bjoraker: Relationships matter, and building a strong working relationship with current SPPS Board of Education members starts with respect, listening, and shared commitment to students. I would approach this work by taking time to understand each Board member's priorities, perspectives, and experiences, recognizing that we all bring different strengths and viewpoints to the table. I believe healthy collaboration requires clear communication, curiosity, and a willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue, even when we don't always agree. I will lead with humility, ask questions, and seek alignment around shared goals, particularly student success, equity, and fiscal responsibility. I also understand the importance of honoring the Board's collective governance role. That means preparing thoughtfully, staying focused on outcomes rather than individual agendas, and supporting decisions once they are made. By showing up consistently, listening with intention, and acting with integrity, I will work to build trust and partnership with fellow Board members so we can work together to support SPPS effectively together.

Omar Syed: I will take time to get to know each board member and build trust. I already know some members through community work and plan to meet with others one-on-one.

I will be open, communicate clearly, and be willing to work through disagreements. We should always be able to work together for the students.

Stephanie Anderson: I already have relationships with all current board members. I managed Yusef Carrillo's 2023 campaign and, during that process, met, spent time and knocked doors with the other 2023 candidates (Carlo Franco, Ericka Valliant and

Chauntyll Allen) and current board members (Uriah Ward and Halla Henderson). Prior to announcing my own campaign, I was Uriah Ward's campaign manager and we continue to work together even as we are now two campaigns. I see the current board members at SPPS and other community events. They know me and, to differing degrees, know about my family. I will continue to grow and nurture these relationships as they expand to those of colleagues on the Board.

Tamara Mattison: I currently have relationships with three of the current board members through working in the school system alongside them, working in restorative practice delivery, and on other advisory committees. I have met others during the District 65A convention and I look forward to building community with others who are seeking election as well as those that are current school board members.

5. After decades of oppositional relationships, SPFE, SPPS families, the District and the SPPS Board of education have started to build more collaborative relationships, resulting in more transparent and consensus-building decision-making. Given the current federal administration, this new and delicate balance is likely to be challenged by pitting partners against each other.

- a. ***Who should be included as “community” when the Board is seeking input and engagement? (Please be as detailed as possible)***

John Bjoraker: I consider “community” to include everyone who has a stake in Saint Paul Public Schools and is impacted by Board decisions. At the center of that community are students, their safety, learning, and wellbeing should always guide our work. Families and caregivers are essential partners, bringing lived experience, trust, and insight into what students need to thrive. The community also includes educators and school staff, represented through SPFE and other employee groups, whose day-to-day work and professional expertise are critical to informed decision-making. It includes community-based organizations, cultural leaders, and advocacy groups who support students and families beyond the classroom and help build trust, especially with communities who have been historically marginalized by systems. I also include neighbors, residents, and taxpayers, including those without children currently enrolled, because strong public schools benefit the entire city. Meaningful engagement requires intentional outreach, accessible formats, and a commitment to listening—especially

when perspectives differ. That's how we protect collaboration and shared responsibility during challenging times.

Omar Syed: Community means everyone connected to our schools. That includes students, families, educators, school staff, and people in the neighborhoods our schools serve.

We have to reach out to families who are often left out, especially immigrant families, renters, and those who don't speak English as their first language. That means language access, going into communities, and creating spaces where people feel comfortable. If we only hear from the same voices, we're not doing our job.

Stephanie Anderson: The SPPS community includes students, families, educators and staff. It includes leaders at the city, county and state levels whose work impacts the functioning and success of SPPS. It includes community partners who provide services like therapy in our schools. As has been made very clear during Operation Metro surge, school communities include community members who have no children in or direct connection to SPPS or a particular school. The more expansive we can be in our definition of community, the more ideas we will get and the more people will feel that they have a real role to play in the success of St. Paul Public Schools.

Tamara Mattison: The community that should be at the table with the Saint Paul Public Schools Board includes those most directly impacted by board decisions. This begins with students, whose lived experiences in SPPS schools provide essential insight into safety, learning conditions, and belonging. Alumni who have graduated from SPPS schools, educators and school staff must be meaningfully engaged, as they understand how policies affect classrooms and student outcomes in practice. Families and caregivers, especially those from historically underserved communities, are critical partners in shaping responsive and equitable schools. The Board should also engage community-based organizations, cultural leaders, and service providers who support students beyond the school day. Healthy governance ensures these voices are not consulted only after decisions are made, but are included early and consistently, creating shared ownership and stronger outcomes for Saint Paul students.

b. What is the role of the board in identifying and advocating for the supports students need to achieve success – both academically and socially?

John Bjoraker: The Board must work in tandem with the Superintendent and her team to ensure students are supported academically and socially, while staying clearly within its governance role. The Board's responsibility is to set priorities, adopt policies, and allocate resources that reflect student needs, while holding the Superintendent accountable for implementing those priorities effectively. That includes identifying gaps in supports, such as mental health supports, academic programming, culturally responsive practices, and positive school climates, and advocating for districtwide strategies to address them. The Board should use data, community input, and educator expertise to guide decisions, ensuring support is equitable and responsive to students' lived experiences. The Board must elevate student and family voice, partner with educators and community organizations, and use public resources responsibly. When the Board leads with clarity, collaboration, and accountability, it helps create the conditions students need to succeed both in the classroom and beyond.

Omar Syed: The board's role is to listen, set clear priorities, and make sure the district is meeting student needs. That includes academics, but also mental health, safety, social environment, and stable staffing.

If students are not getting what they need, it's our responsibility to push for change.

Stephanie Anderson: This involves communication between the Board and the educators and staff on the ground to find out where the strengths and opportunities for growth lie. I appreciate the BIGG goals for Student Outcomes because growth is measured comparing SPPS to SPPS and they include skills pertaining to civics and personal finance that will significantly impact how our students go out into the world after leaving SPPS. I do think they could go further to include some specific goals around supporting our students' social development, and I think the outreach process would be the same. The Board must continue to do community education on these BIGG goals because test scores are so often the way that the success of our district is measured by the community and often what a family uses to decide to enroll in or even disenroll their student from SPPS.

Tamara Mattison: A strong School Board listens to students, families, and educators, makes transparent and informed decisions, and holds the system accountable for student outcomes. There are 3 top performing schools in the district: Capitol Hill Magnet, Highland Park Elementary, and Horace Mann Elementary therefore if we institute what's working in those schools into the lower performing schools, we can close that 50 point gap between the highest performing schools and the lowest performing schools.

c. How will you as a board member hold the district and superintendent accountable to achieving student success?

John Bjoraker: As a former teacher, assistant principal, and principal, I have a clear understanding of what meaningful student success looks like, both academically and socially. I believe the Board plays a critical role in holding the district and Superintendent accountable by setting clear, measurable goals for student outcomes and regularly progress monitoring toward those goals. This requires Board members to be well-versed in student outcome data, equity indicators, and the instructional practices being implemented across schools. With that understanding, we can ask informed, strategic questions, identify gaps, and ensure district initiatives are aligned with Board priorities and student needs. Accountability also means using agreed-upon metrics to evaluate progress, being transparent with the public, and taking corrective action when outcomes fall short.

Omar Syed: It starts with clear goals and expectations. The board can not just react to what has already happened.

We need to regularly review progress, ask questions, and be honest about what is working and what is not. If the district is not meeting the needs of students, we have to step in and make changes. Accountability also means being transparent with the public.

Stephanie Anderson: I appreciate and support the specificity with which BIGG outlines the reporting expectations and compliance. I will pay careful attention to reports and commit to holding the administration accountable when they are not meeting expectations. This might also mean considering what additional on-the-ground supports may be needed when we are not hitting our BIGG targets. I want to learn more about flexibility in BIGG and will address this in my next answer.

Tamara Mattison: Holding the district and the superintendent accountable requires clear expectations, consistent oversight, and transparency with the public. The School Board's primary accountability tools include setting measurable goals aligned with SPPS's mission and equity commitments, approving a budget that reflects those priorities, and regularly monitoring progress using data and community feedback. Accountability also means asking hard questions, ensuring follow-through on adopted policies, and addressing concerns early rather than reacting after problems escalate. Through proactive measures the school board can avoid emotional reactions to incidents that could have been properly equipped with a response vs a reaction. Board leadership is not a position it is a responsibility.

d. What does partnership between the board and educators look like in helping students achieve academic success?

John Bjoraker: A strong partnership between the Board and educators is essential to helping students achieve academic success. That partnership starts with listening, valuing educators as professionals who understand students' needs, classroom realities, and what supports are truly effective. As a Board member, my role would be to stay grounded in what is happening in our schools by engaging regularly with educators and SPFE, asking thoughtful questions, and seeking clarity about instructional practices, student supports, and resource gaps. That understanding allows the Board to make informed governance decisions, setting priorities, and establishing policies that support high-quality teaching and learning. Partnership does not mean managing classrooms, but it does mean respecting educator expertise, communicating transparently, and ensuring Board decisions align with what students and educators need to succeed. When trust, collaboration, and shared purpose guide the relationship, students benefit.

Omar Syed: It means working together, not separately. The board, district, and educators should be aligned on goals and stay in communication.

We need to listen to educators when they tell us what students need and reflect that in our decisions. It also means being transparent and building trust, even when we don't always agree.

Stephanie Anderson: To my understanding educators were, and rightfully so, key stakeholders providing feedback in the development of BIGG goals and the Strategic Plan. Continual communication, flexibility and transparency are all necessary, as well as a willingness to adjust based on feedback from our educators, who are some of the most knowledgeable about student progress and needs. For example, as a parent of a kid with social and emotional needs and who sees how much time and energy the educators at GAP dedicate to her social and emotional growth, I wonder about a social and emotional BIGG goal. As societal inequities and systems of oppression become more visible to the general community (like with Operation Metro Surge), BIGG might respond with additional goals to push our students' learning forward in those areas. I also think we could make our Special Education students and families feel specifically reflected in the BIGG goals.

Tamara Mattison: Partnership between the board and educators looks like sitting in classrooms and observing what's working and what's not working while collaborating on solutions.

6. Student safety has long been a concern for parents, students and educators. The COVID pandemic changed our understanding of safety to include protecting students and staff from viral outbreaks. Operation Metro Surge heightened to the need to protect students and staff from ICE abductions. "Safety" is an ever-broadening term

a. What is your definition of "school safety"?

John Bjoraker: School safety means creating environments where students and staff feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe. That includes freedom from discrimination, harassment, and fear. Safety also means students and staff feel welcomed, respected, and supported, regardless of race, immigration status, ability, or identity. A truly safe school allows students to learn, take risks, and be themselves while trusting the adults around them will protect their dignity and well-being.

Omar Syed: School safety means students and staff feel safe, supported, and able to focus on learning.

When ICE shows up in our communities or near our schools, that safety is broken. Students can't focus. Immigrant parents are afraid to send their kids to school. Staff are dealing with their own fear while trying to support students. ICE's actions have kept kids home and disrupted learning.

Safety does not come from turning schools into security zones, and it does not come from targeting immigrant families. It comes from trust, strong relationships, and making schools welcoming places where every student and every worker can show up without fear.

Stephanie Anderson: A safe school is a school where everyone, especially those most marginalized by our society, feels comfortable to bring their whole self. It is a school where bullying is talked and taught about and not tolerated. A safe school is not a school that looks and operates like a prison. A safe school addresses the mental and chemical health of students. Students, families, educators, staff and community all play a role in defining a safe school. However, when we think about "safety", we must consider the role that our racist, imperialist, capitalist, neoliberal state plays in the

definition of what many consider safe. This should require ongoing conversation and education - inside and outside of schools with a variety of stakeholders - around the systemic oppression of BIPOC individuals, LGBTQIA+ folx and immigrants and refugees as well as disabled students whose safety needs are unique and sometimes marginalized.

Tamara Mattison: True school safety also means students feel a sense of belonging, are treated with dignity, and trust that adults will respond fairly and consistently when harm occurs. Safe schools prioritize strong relationships, restorative practices, mental health support, and culturally responsive approaches that prevent harm before it escalates. Safety is not about fear or punishment; it is about connection, accountability, and care. When schools are safe, students can focus on learning, educators are able to teach effectively, and families trust the system to support their children's well-being.

b. What steps will you take to include students, families, educators, and community in creating school safety policy?

John Bjoraker: I would begin with ensuring that the board and the Superintendent's team has a clear understanding and vision for the school safety policy. We would then be strategic and thoughtful in how we create our task force or committee to begin engaging in the work. We would ensure we had representation that mirrors the diversity of our school district. There would be intentionality on creating space for members to share their perspectives and ideas to support the work of the school safety policy. We would create mechanisms for feedback loops and listening sessions to promote transparency. I would also recommend yearly reviews of the policy to ensure the policy is doing what it set out to do, which aligns to the vision and purpose of the policy.

Omar Syed: I would meet with students, families, educators, and staff of every community in their neighborhoods, make sure there is language access, and create spaces where people can speak honestly.

Students especially need to be part of this. Their feeling of safety is what is most important.

Stephanie Anderson: I will talk with stakeholders I mentioned above. I will research what other districts across our state and nation have done around school safety, thoughtfully assess their feasibility for SPPS and bring those ideas to outreach sessions because I think it can be hard for us (me included) to think outside the box when it

comes to defining safety, given the narratives that permeate our society around what safe looks like. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to school safety.

Tamara Mattison: During parent groups that are culturally responsive enable families to define what safety looks like for their children. Psychological safety is the condition in which students and adults feel emotionally secure enough to be themselves, speak honestly, ask for help, and make mistakes without fear of humiliation, retaliation, or exclusion. In psychologically safe schools, individuals trust that they will be treated with dignity, that their identities will be respected, and that harm will be addressed fairly and consistently. I know from experience if school is psychologically safe and so do our students. Psychological safety is built through strong relationships, clear expectations, responsive adult support, and proactive prevention of bullying, bias, and intimidation. It is especially critical for students who have historically experienced marginalization, as it directly impacts engagement, learning, and well-being.

c. How will you center the voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous and immigrant students in discussion of school safety?

John Bjoraker: I will intentionally create spaces where students from Black, Brown, Indigenous, and immigrant communities feel safe sharing their experiences, especially around policing, discipline, and immigration enforcement. This means partnering with cultural leaders, trusted organizations, and educators to ensure engagement is culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and accessible. Centering these voices is essential to building safety policies that protect students without causing harm.

Omar Syed: As likely the only East African on the board, I will make sure immigrant voices, including my own community, are at the table. I already have trust in those spaces.

I will bring those voices into decisions by going directly to people, listening, and making sure they are included from the start.

Stephanie Anderson: I recognize that our Black, Brown, Indigenous and immigrant and refugee students may often feel very differently about safety measures and what can feel safe for some can feel oppressive and threatening to others. I will work with and learn from my non-white colleagues on the Board to learn from what they share as well as continue to learn what my role, as a white person, is when I come into spaces where I am asking for the input of BIPOC folx.

Tamara Mattison: When psychological safety is present, students are more willing to participate, take academic risks, and remain connected to school, and educators are better able to collaborate, innovate, and support student growth.

d. What role should Restorative Justice play in reducing discipline and suspension disparities? Specifically, how will you partner with SPFE in funding and expanding Restorative Justice to reduce discipline and suspension disparities?

John Bjoraker: Restorative Justice should play a central role in reducing discipline and suspension disparities by focusing on healing, accountability, and relationship-building rather than punishment. For Restorative Justice to be effective, we must also acknowledge and address the deep distrust many students and families, particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous, and immigrant communities, have experienced in traditional discipline systems. That means investing in capacity building, not just programs. I support sustained funding for restorative practices, time for training, and dedicated staff so educators are not asked to do this work without support. Partnering closely with SPFE is essential to ensure implementation is consistent, educator-supported, and grounded in the protocol. Overcoming distrust requires commitment, transparency, and follow-through. Restorative Justice must be culturally responsive, center student voice, and be practiced with fidelity across schools. When done well, it builds trust, strengthens relationships, and creates safer, more inclusive schools for all students.

Omar Syed: Restorative Practices should be a central part of how we approach discipline. They reduce suspensions and keep students connected to school.

There is already a board goal to expand this work, and I support that. I would work with SPFE to push for the funding and support needed so educators can do this well.

As a board member, I will work to develop a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities within restorative practices to ensure a successful program. I will rely on SPFE as a partner on the front lines to help me determine what is working and what needs to change.

Stephanie Anderson: This is a topic that I am dedicated to learning more about. I will work on this and also will talk with my colleagues on the Board, like Carlo Franco and Chauntyll Allen, to learn more about how restorative justice looks like in SPPS. I will

learn about the three schools in our district that have the Whole School Restorative Practices model. I do believe that restorative justice can help address root causes for conflicts, and the 7 core assumptions around restorative practices mostly resonate with me. Based on conversations I have had with friends and constituents, I think we need education for the community on what restorative justice is, and we also need to listen to our families when they talk about their experience with it.

Tamara Mattison: Restorative Justices/Practices plays one of the most important roles in reducing discipline and suspension disparities. I've been working as a restorative practitioner for over 25 years and every school that we have provided training to staff each year through MDE has always talked about improvements to student behavior, attendance, and conflict resolution. "In almost five years since our launch, we have produced far better safety and justice outcomes for our community compared to the 10 years prior to 2021 and we have the data to prove it," said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. "We did this by transitioning away from an adversarial and legal consequence model to a more collaborative and restorative response through a collaborative review team that determines the best pathway to success for justice-involved youth and generates for more meaningful engagement of youth to repair harm with victims, family members, and peers." The work that my organization and team have done with John Choi office has provided data that supports a 4% rate of recidivism for those who participated in a restorative process. I currently have teams in Harding and Washington providing restorative circles for girl's groups.

7. Operation Metro Surge has caused deep trauma in Saint Paul. Across the city, individuals have joined mutual aid and Rapid Response networks to protect our community. Additionally, the current administration has made it clear that they will target school districts that seek to protect and support our LGBTQIA+ and immigrant students.

a. *What are steps that SPPS can take to partner with community to protect our students, while also minimizing potential federal threats?*

John Bjoraker: SPPS and the Board of Education must partner closely with our school communities to ensure we are protecting students while being thoughtful and strategic in a challenging political environment. First, the district can strengthen partnerships with

trusted community organizations, so schools are not acting alone but as part of a broader safety net. Second, SPPS can focus on clear, consistent policies that affirm the dignity, privacy, and safety of all students, especially immigrant and LGBTQIA+ students, while training staff so those policies are understood and followed. When educators know what to do and who to call, students are safer and schools are less exposed. Third, communication matters. SPPS should proactively share information with families about their rights, available supports, and how schools handle safety concerns. Transparency builds trust and reduces fear.

Omar Syed: SPPS needs their own strong policies to protect students. That means not allowing ICE into schools without proper legal process, training staff on what to do, and making sure families know their rights.

At the same time, SPPS is not equipped to fight federal abuse on its own. I am proud of how our community has stood up for families like mine over the last few months. We must support the good work that mutual aid, observers, and SPFE have been doing to protect our children.

Stephanie Anderson: I think the SPPS Parent Solidarity Network has been doing incredibly important work partnering with the community. I am a HPMS parent lead and a Region 6 (West Side) region lead. I have attended many meetings with the leadership team of the SPPS PSN as well as weekly meetings with all the parent and educator leads across the District. As the SPPS PSN evolves, we should continue to prioritize community engagement and protecting the rights of our most vulnerable children, families and neighbors. I think the District and Board should mostly leave this organizing to SPFE and the PSN, but should absolutely be informed on what is going on and ways that they might be able to help with policy such as the prohibition of ICE in our schools. We need to continue to stand up against the abuse of federal power.

Tamara Mattison: Community has suffered so much trauma over the past decade that we have survived federal threats before. ICE behavior may be new to some but not to most low-income communities where brutality, false imprisonment, and lack of resources have been the norm. Understanding the needs of our students and families are the only way we can help to protect their basic needs.

b. The Office of Family Engagement and the SPPS PACs have a record of supporting LGBTQIA+ and immigrant students. How can SPPS strengthen and expand this work? How will

you do as an SPPS School Board member expand this work?

John Bjoraker: As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I believe it is my responsibility to help strengthen and expand the work already happening through the Office of Family Engagement and the SPPS PACs. These groups have earned trust by showing up, listening, and advocating alongside families, and that foundation matters. SPPS can build on this by investing more consistently in staff capacity and outreach that meets families where they are. Supporting PAC leaders with training, resources, and clear pathways to influence Board and district decisions will help move this work from engagement to shared leadership.

As a School Board member, I would champion protecting and expanding this work by ensuring it is adequately funded, visible, and integrated into district decision-making. I will listen to LGBTQIA+ and immigrant families, elevate their concerns at the Board table, and work to ensure our schools remain welcoming, affirming places where every family feels safe, seen, and supported.

Omar Syed: SPPS should invest more in the Office of Family Engagement and continue supporting the PACs that are already doing this work.

We must be clear that all students are welcome and protected, explicitly including LGBTQIA+ students and immigrant students. We must respect student's identities and cultures, and create safe spaces to express them.

As a board member, I will push for this investment, be vocal about my support for all students no matter their identity or background, and lift up voices from LGBTQIA+ and immigrant communities.

Stephanie Anderson: All students deserve to have their multiple identities protected and celebrated at school. Operation Metro Surge has brought immigrant issues into our schools more than ever before, and I think we should continue to have conversations around immigration. We also routinely see policy and court decisions that continue to marginalize our LGBTQIA+ population. We need to do all that we can to make sure our LGBTQIA+ students feel that their identity is uplifted at school. I will learn about the curriculum that we are teaching in classes like social studies, history, government and civics to make sure that we are being inclusive in what we teach. I will advocate for things like clubs and after school programming as well as support student-initiated and led groups that create spaces for exploring individual identities.

Tamara Mattison: Staff with lived experiences will always be trusted messengers in our student population. Educating ourselves on cultural differences and respecting those differences is the only way we will stand together as we meet the needs of those with less by sharing time, relationships, and resources. It's 11:35 pm and I am running out of steam, so I am working to finish this questionnaire.

8. 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?

John Bjoraker: Co-governance and people-centered democracy mean sharing power, responsibility, and decision-making with the people most impacted by those decisions. To me, co-governance is about working alongside educators, families, students, labor partners, and community organizations, engaging them early, listening seriously, and shaping solutions together. People-centered democracy means decisions are grounded in real lived experiences, not just policy or politics. It requires openness, honesty about constraints, and a willingness to be held accountable when commitments are made. It also means maintaining ongoing communication. In practice, this looks like transparent processes, early engagement with partners like SPFE, shared problem-solving, and followthrough. It asks leaders to listen with humility, lead with integrity, and remember that public institutions work best when trust, respect, and collaboration are at the center of our work.

Omar Syed: It means making decisions with people, not for them. It means staying close to the community, being open, and being willing to be held accountable. It means working closely with partners like educators and families, not treating them as an afterthought.

Stephanie Anderson: Co-governance and people-centered democracy looks like shifting governing culture from a very strict hierarchy structure to engaging with ground-level partners like students, families, educators and staff in schools, SPFE, AFSCME and our other bargaining units in SPPS, site councils and PTAs and using their ideas and expertise to build authentic, power- and responsibility-sharing relationships that

lead to policy that moves our district forward. It means that one group's voice should not overshadow another's and that leadership reflects the demographics of our school district whenever possible. It also means holding all of us in the co-governance model to standards of transparency and accountability.

Tamara Mattison: In a people-centered democracy, policies are shaped with communities, not merely for them, and decision makers actively listen, engage, and respond to community voices. This approach values transparency, equity, and dignity, recognizing that strong democratic systems are built when people feel seen, heard, and able to influence outcomes that affect their lives. In education and local governance, people centered democracy means elevating student, family, educator, and community voices as essential partners in shaping systems that serve the public good. What I experienced at the convention is this district does not exist which is why I am running for school board.

b. What groups and individuals will you look to for guidance (please be as specific as possible?).

John Bjoraker: I will first and foremost lean on the support and experience of my fellow SPPS Board of Education members, recognizing the importance of collaboration, shared governance, and learning from those already serving in this role. Their institutional knowledge and perspectives will be essential as we navigate complex decisions together. I will also look to educators and school staff, including leaders within SPFE, as trusted partners. Their day-to-day experience in our schools provides critical insight into how decisions impact classrooms, students, and working conditions. Students and families are equally essential guides in my decision-making. Hearing directly from students about their experiences, and from families about their hopes and concerns, helps ensure policies reflect real needs.

Omar Syed: I will look to students, educators, school staff, and families first. I will stay connected to community leaders and organizers, including from my own East African community like Ahmed Anshur. I will listen to labor leaders like those from SPFE and AFSCME. I've also been learning from current leaders like Uriah Ward and Garrison McMurtrey and others who are already doing this work.

Stephanie Anderson: I will look to the groups mentioned (but not limited to those) above for guidance: students, families, educators and staff in schools, SPFE, AFSCME and our other bargaining units in SPPS, site councils and PTAs. Because of my engagement over the 10 years we have been an SPPS family and involvement in my

communities, I have met many people connected to SPPS. I will talk with those friends and acquaintances and get to know more people. I am a white, cis-gender, middle-class, citizen, able-bodied, college-educated (and the list could go on) woman. I cannot truly know the embodied experience in schools of people that don't look like me and share the privileges that I have. I will never use this as an excuse to be uninformed about how others experience our school district.

Tamara Mattison: I look to the faith community, African American Leadership Council, Community of professionals, small business partners, non-profit organizations, and parents in communities (the village).

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

John Bjoraker: Communities absolutely need to be part of the decision-making process. If decisions are going to reflect real needs and build trust, they must be made with people, not for them. I would start by engaging communities early, so voices help shape the direction rather than simply react to outcomes. That means showing up in schools and neighborhoods, listening to families, students, educators, and community partners, and creating multiple, accessible ways for people to share input. I believe in meeting people where they are, using clear language, and making sure voices that have historically been left out are intentionally included. I also believe transparency matters. When people see that their input genuinely influences decisions, trust grows, and that's how we build stronger schools and stronger communities together.

Omar Syed: I will make sure community engagement happens before decisions are made, not after. I will push the Superintendent to show how community feedback shapes decisions.

I will also spend time in the community, not just at board meetings, to make sure people see how we use their feedback and hear directly from people who can't attend every meeting.

Stephanie Anderson: I will be an engaged board member, present in spaces where I can gather the voices of stakeholders. I will actively reach out to stakeholders, including SPFE and educators, before making decisions. I will visit schools and make sure to be available to meet with all groups of stakeholders at a school when I visit (educators, staff, students). I want to make sure that stakeholders are involved in the planning process as soon as possible.

Tamara Mattison: I am community, so will make sure that working with communities will begin n not doing things to community or for communities. Making decisions for community without community isn't equitable, nor collaboration, nor does it build community within community! Too many families have no say in their student's education when they are their child's first teacher.

d. 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?

John Bjoraker: Educators and student voices matter, and I believe they should be part of decision-making from the beginning. I will seek out educator and student voice by showing up in schools, listening in classrooms, and creating regular opportunities for feedback. Hearing directly from those closest to the work helps ensure decisions are grounded in real experiences. I will invite SPFE in as a key stakeholder by engaging early, communicating often, and valuing educators as partners. That means sharing information transparently, asking for input before major decisions, and maintaining open lines of communication rooted in trust and respect. Sharing information with SPFE, parents, and students requires clarity and consistency, so people understand what's happening, why decisions are being made, and how they can stay engaged.

Omar Syed: I will stay in regular communication with SPFE and educators, not just during big moments. I support having regular town halls and office hours, including spaces focused on students.

I will share information clearly and early so people can actually respond before decisions are made.

Stephanie Anderson: Following a co-governance model, I will place the voices of SPFE, parents, and students each equally with that of the administration when seeking input on a decision, rather than getting a recommendation from district administration and then placing all feedback in terms of the administration's perspective. I will make sure that all stakeholders have access to all the information available so they can participate fully and equally in the decision making process.

Tamara Mattison: I have lived my personal and professional life through collaboration and youth voice so adding SPFE to my relationship will be great!

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

John Bjoraker: I believe accountability to the public good starts with remembering who this work is for: students, families, and the broader community. While I bring personal experiences and strong feelings to the table, as a lifelong Saint Paul resident, SPPS alum, and over 17 years working in education, I know that Board service requires looking beyond myself and making decisions based on what is best for the whole district. I separate my personal feelings by listening carefully, asking questions, and grounding decisions in data, policy, and community input. I lead with experience, but I listen with heart, especially when perspectives differ from my own. That balance helps me stay focused on outcomes rather than emotions. Being accountable also means being transparent, fiscally responsible with public resources, and willing to explain the “why” behind decisions. I may not always agree with every outcome, but I will always act with integrity, respect the governance process, and center students and public trust above personal preference.

Omar Syed: This role is not about me, it’s about the community.

I will listen to many people, not just the ones I agree with, and I will not take disagreement personally. I will take time to understand the full situation before making decisions.

Regardless of my personal opinion, I will ask what is best for students, families, and educators across the city. That’s what will guide my decisions.

Stephanie Anderson: Through my actions as a parent, student, educator, organizer, engaged community member and school board candidate, I have shown that education, namely public education, is something I am passionate about and take very seriously. I am a lifelong learner and commit to always make decisions to the best of my ability by seeking the perspective of all stakeholders and carefully considering the best (or in some cases the least bad or least harmful) decision. It is important to say that the best / least harmful decision might not be the one to benefit the greatest number of people. In my decision-making process, I will prioritize the opinions and needs of those in our community whose voices are marginalized and often ignored or silenced by systemic oppression. I recognize that this will likely lead to pushback from white constituents, and I will respond to that pushback with thoughtfulness and firmness.

Tamara Mattison: My personal experiences have shaped the passion and diligence to make this place a better place than I found it. It's the fuel by which I have grown since arriving in this state in 1994 on welfare and food stamps to achieve a PhD in Organizational Management with a specialization in Leadership so I stand on my voice with integrity to make sure I am a voice for the voiceless.

9. Every current AND future student of SPPS will live in a world irreparably impacted by climate change. Students are experiencing extreme heat, worsening food insecurity, poor air quality, extreme weather events and other impacts which ALL directly impact their ability to learn. Aggressive leadership is needed NOW to limit those impacts as much as possible and to help prepare our communities and students how to best adapt to our future planet.

a. What specific things will you do on a micro and macro level to address the issue of climate change for our students of the present and the future? How can our public schools become leaders in our communities addressing climate change? How will you include students and educators in addressing the impacts of climate change that are impacting our public schools?

John Bjoraker: First, we need to educate our educators and students about climate change—grounding our work in science, local impacts, and real-world solutions. At a micro level, I would support integrating climate literacy into existing curriculum, student-led projects, and hands-on learning opportunities that connect environmental responsibility to everyday school life. At a broader level, I would advocate for districtwide steps that help reduce our environmental footprint, like making our buildings more energy-efficient, choosing more sustainable purchasing options, and planning ahead for long-term climate impacts. It's important that we do this in ways that are practical and fiscally responsible. I also believe schools can't do this work alone, so I would support partnering with families, community organizations, and local experts to extend these efforts beyond our school buildings and into the community.

Omar Syed: Climate change is already affecting our students.

We need to make sure our school buildings are ready. New geothermal technology could help us heat our schools sustainably, and improvements in ventilation and cooling can make students more comfortable for learning.

I support the work of the new sustainability committee and would be interested in serving on it. That's where a lot of this work can move forward.

Schools can also lead by teaching about sustainability and connecting science education to what they are seeing in real life.

Students and educators must be part of this. I will listen to what they are seeing and include them in planning so the solutions actually work.

Stephanie Anderson: I am proud that the Board chose to divest from fossil fuels and I want to learn more about the Board's sustainability committee and am interested in serving on it, if possible. I am interested in exploring ways that our sites might be able to use alternate energies like solar and geothermal. I will support and advocate for science education that includes units on climate change and sustainability. My daughter is in the Eco club at her school and I have heard about composting programs at other schools. I will learn more about these more organic (no pun intended) offerings and how we, as a board, can support and elevate them.

Tamara Mattison: When students' basic needs are met then they can focus on climate change. Our students of color have not been included or exposed to such topics and therefore my goal is to expose them to the very things that have been held back from their education. When food insecurity exists, families find it hard to understand climate change however we can expose them to small wins like replacing their light bulbs to conserve energy.