

# CUSD Governing Board Candidate Questionnaire

**Lara Bruner**

**How long have you lived in Chandler USD boundaries?**

9 years



## **Education Summary**

I was awarded a full scholarship to Rutgers University, earning a BA in Special Education and Psychology with college honors. My MA is from ASU (4.0 GPA), and I have 70 credits beyond my Masters for a Gifted Education Endorsement, Structured English Immersion Endorsement, and Career and Technical Education Certificate.

## **Current Employment**

This is my 27th year teaching. I have been at Desert Vista High School in Tempe Union High School District since 2004.

## **Civic Engagement**

My primary service to the community is, of course, as a teacher to my students. In addition, I have served multiple district committees including: certified evaluation, teacher incentive plan, administrator hiring, community relations, business advisory, budget, and interest-based decision-making committees. I am part of a team that increases mental health, wellness, and substance use awareness at my campus. I served as the president of Tempe Secondary Education Association and am the Arizona Educators United Liaison for Desert Vista High School.

Statewide, I am the founder and director of The Arizona Teaching of Psychology (ATOP) Conference. Additionally, I serve on the Special Education Advisory Panel and on the Accommodations Task Force for the state of Arizona.

## **Questions**

### **1. What unique qualifications do you bring to the Chandler USD Governing Board?**

My experience in the classroom and as a teacher leader (see civic engagement above) give me a unique perspective that no other candidate possesses.

### **2. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge facing our school district, and how would you address it as a board member?**

In my opinion, the greatest challenge that faces CUSD specifically is the projected enrollment numbers and a shift in the student population, which means decreased ADM and smaller economies of scale. Larger class sizes, reduced staff health care benefits, and less resources for students may result. By exploring programs from across the nation, surveying families, communicating with businesses, and listening to educators, we can find creative solutions together. Magnet programs that draw outside enrollment, repurposing of buildings for the district and/or community, and opportunities for teachers to create inventive, effective curriculum all work to prevent and even reverse declining enrollment.

A second issue that will affect all districts is the looming teacher crisis. There is a dearth of new teachers entering our profession. We must step up our advocacy for increased teacher pay, better working conditions, more autonomy, and greater opportunities for professional development at the local and state level.

**3. What role do you feel CEA should have in the district? How would you engage with CEA in your role as a board member?**

CEA should be the go-to organization for decisions that affect certified staff. I believe it is most advantageous to meet with administration individually (with ESPOC meeting with administration individually as well) in an interest-based decision-making process guided by a working conditions document. CEA should also be picking all certified employee representation on committees as they are the recognized representatives of certified staff. As a board member, I would like to meet on a regular basis with CEA to get direct input from teachers. I also believe it is vital to have CEA run an in-depth staff satisfaction survey every year to gather feedback on site and district issues.

**4. Describe your decision-making process and how you would utilize it as a board member regarding district policies such as contracts, working conditions, evaluations, etc.**

In addition to pulling from my extensive experience with all these issues, I would seek the input of certified and classified staff, administrative and legal input, then go to statewide resources such as ASBA and the AEA/NEA to explore options in making decisions on these policies. All decisions should be based on evidence-based practices that increase student achievement and employee engagement, job satisfaction, and input. I have explored this area in depth while serving on negotiations, recruit/retain committee, and the certified evaluation committee for my district.

**5. As a board member, how would you help the district attract and retain talented education professionals?**

Money and culture. Research tells us that if you pay someone enough to meet their needs and create a culture of support, purpose, and respect, educators will come *and stay*. One of the greatest frustrations that my colleagues and I have discussed is not feeling valued. Beyond the lack of funding for salaries by our state representatives, the increase in top-down directives from state and district administration can make us feel like we have no say in what we are doing. Creating a culture of bottom-up, teacher-driven decision making can make a huge impact on the turn-over rate in a district. This brings us back to the concept of interest-based decision-making for certified staff driven by a working conditions document.

**6. As a board member, how would you prioritize funding in the face of severe budget cuts (e.g., loss of federal funds, legislative cuts, reduction in student population/per-pupil funding, etc.)?**

There should always be a 2-pronged approach: find ways to increase revenue then cut the least vital areas as a last resort. Some areas to consider are looking at Title 1 funding for one or more high schools, creating inventive, teacher-driven programs that draw in open enrollment, and continuing to make in-class spending the priority. We need to communicate the needs to the community and ensure that they see the ramifications of low funding from the state. Rather than being reactive, I believe educators and the community are beginning to see that they need to be proactive.

**7. What is your position regarding due process rights for school employees? Explain.**

As someone who has served as an advocate for both probationary and continuing status certified staff, I have served to support due process for teachers, counselors and others. There should be very specific processes in place that include CEA representation at any meetings regarding members, teacher and evaluator input in the evaluation, and clear, measurable objectives to any improvement plans. Evaluation instruments can only function when they operate on a growth model. We do not want to retain educators who are unwilling or unable to meet the needs of students, but we also must make sure we follow a fair and equitable procedure that gives time and supports to help certified staff reach effective and highly effective status.

**8. What is your position on Proposition 305, and will you sign the invest in ed pledge as a candidate and/or a voter? Explain.**

I have a "No on 305" sticker on my car and my husband's car. I have distributed literature to friends and canvassed to spread the word on this issue. It disgusts me that the pro-voucher movement has decided to steal the Red for Ed branding on their posters to make it look like teachers support 305. It is beyond disingenuous; it is outright deceptive.

Though board members have no power to create most of what is listed in the pledge (except a certified salary structure), I fully support and have signed the Invest in Ed pledge. But I don't think it goes far enough. We must look beyond 2008 levels of funding and move towards the median level of per pupil spending in the nation. Additionally, we need to consider more than what people say, but look at what they have done. I have canvassed in this election and in previous ones for pro-education candidates, ballot measures, and bonds/overrides. I was the keynote speaker at the Ahwatukee/Tempe/West Chandler rally for March 4 Schools and the first AEU liaison for Tempe Union. I am a long-time member of the AEA and served as president of my local association. We must put pro-education candidates of action on local boards, in the legislature, and in the governor's office.