

CUSD Governing Board Candidate Questionnaire

Jim Robinson



How long have you lived in Chandler USD boundaries?

17 years

Education Summary

Bachelors in Spanish from Hamilton College in NY

Masters in Business Administration from WP Carey School of Business at Arizona State University

Current Employment

Small-business owner of a real-estate investment company; former Intel executive

Civic Engagement

Periodic volunteer work

Additional Information

Parent of 3 current CUSD students

Questions

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

The school board should be run like a business, and I have a strong track record of professional success that I seek to bring to this position. I earned my Masters in Business Administration from ASU's WP Carey School of Business in 2001, and I am currently the owner of a small-business startup that has grown into a multi-million dollar company in a little over two years. I previously held various management and executive leadership positions at Intel Corporation in Chandler during my 15+ years there. Most notably, I was appointed General Manager of an over \$1 billion business unit where I led an organization of 300+ employees. During this time, my business unit consistently met or exceeded all revenue targets while always operating within our quarterly budget targets.

Furthermore, and perhaps most important, as a parent of three teenagers who have been enrolled in CUSD their entire lives, I have had direct exposure to our wonderful schools, teachers, and administrators on a daily basis. I believe my perspective as a parent of current students in CUSD will be invaluable in shaping future policy while maintaining and building upon CUSD's tremendous accomplishments over the last several years.

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

While there is no shortage of challenges facing our school district today (the state's educational funding shortage, for example), I believe the most pressing issue that the CUSD school board is actually empowered to most directly address and improve is our school safety and the emotional health of our students. Our students and teachers deserve to feel safe in our schools, and CUSD needs to be more proactive in identifying and engaging with students who may be struggling. While there are many contributing factors to the increase in school violence, youth suicide rates, and mental health issues across the nation, I believe that our smartphone-centric society is a primary root cause. As a parent of CUSD students, I have seen how the ever-increasing overuse of technology has drastically affected our children's emotional/social development, which has hindered their ability to form substantive connections with others and to communicate professionally and effectively.

Many public-school districts around the country have given this topic significant focus, so rather than reinvent the wheel for CUSD, I would like to study and learn from that body of work so that we may quickly and efficiently implement common-sense initiatives for CUSD that have proven to be effective elsewhere. I would seek to engage with law enforcement, counselors, teachers, parents, and the community at large to augment CUSD's Journey 2025 strategic plan.

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?

The stated mission of the CEA is to be involved in all aspects of the educational process and an advocate for its members and the issues that affect them. I welcome the opportunity to engage with the CEA in this mission. If elected, I want to serve and represent all teachers, administrators, parents and students, so I pledge to be open, transparent and accessible to all parties.

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.

I believe that good decision making for any organization begins with a strong vision of purpose coupled with a well-articulated, measurable set of long-term strategic goals. CUSD has done a fantastic job developing a clear, multi-year vision with Journey 2025, and all decisions over district policy need to align with it. Over the course of my professional career, I have developed a reputation as a highly collaborative leader that makes tough decisions based on the best available data. My decision-making approach is to begin by seeking input from all stakeholders. I then evaluate all possible options and look for areas of common ground. There are always tradeoffs associated with any decision, and it is crucial that these tradeoffs are well understood and accounted for in any decision-making process. Finally, once a decision has been made, it is critical to communicate it transparently to all stakeholders so that the logic and rationale for any decision is well understood, along with the metrics that will be used to monitor the impact and efficacy of that decision moving forward. Finally, the role of the decision maker does not end at that point. There must be ongoing, objective reviews of past decisions made to ensure the success and relevance of those decisions, and to adjust as needed.

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

While Arizona has struggled with teacher attraction and retention, CUSD is in a uniquely favorable position in this area. I believe Chandler has been among the most engaged and supportive communities across the state, with involved parents and a business community that contributes a tremendous amount of time, money, and energy into the success of public education. I pledge to build upon the success of CUSD by continuing to operate an A+ district with a responsible board and reputable administration, and by offering higher-than-average salaries across the state. However, we must not only provide the highest salaries in Arizona, we must also offer competitive pay compared to surrounding states. I am strongly committed to continuing to direct all additional CUSD funding from the state to our teachers and classrooms.

Coupled with competitive pay, we must also continue to provide solid training and development programs for our teachers to support their professional development and to retain our good students and families in our district.

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.)?

Operating any successful organization requires the difficult task of making tough trade-off decisions when it comes to budget allocation. A healthy organization will always have competing uses for limited resources. While the CUSD school board has limited control over the state's educational legislative agenda, or our student population/per-pupil funding, the board has full empowerment over how our limited dollars and resources are allocated. My priority would be to ensure we are focused first and foremost on our CUSD students and our teachers/administrators. This must always be at the heart of the governing board's budget-allocation process.

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

Based on our Constitution, everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and everyone should always have the right to a fair hearing. I support teacher tenure and I would only consider punitive action when one of our teachers has been proven to have violated district policy.

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 am adamantly opposed to Proposition 305. While I do believe in school choice, I do not believe in allocating taxpayer money toward private education, and I fear that any expansion of the current ESA program would be a slippery slope that would open the door to future funds shifting away from our already depleted public-school budget. I support the government initiative that created the existing ESA program to serve the families of children with special needs that may benefit more from private services than public. However, lack of program oversight has already allowed for the inappropriate allocation of funds to private schools, and I fear that any expansion of the program would result in even more money being taken away from public schools. Arizona families already have so many options like open-enrollment within public-school districts or charters, so any expansion of the ESA program does not sit well with me.

Regarding the Invest in Ed pledge, the points included in the pledge do not pertain to me as a candidate for governing board. In this non-partisan position, I will not have the authority to legislate our state's funding model or to set the state budget, and consequently, school board candidates have not been requested to sign the pledge. What I will pledge to do, however, is allocate whatever monies CUSD receives and work with the rest of the board to create a competitive salary structure for our teachers and support professionals, as well as direct dollars to the classrooms for our students.