

Candidate Responses for School District 204

Vote for no more than 4

Shannon Adcock - no response

Laurie Donahue

1. **What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

District 204 employees accumulate benefit time (i.e. sick days, business days, vacation days) to support needed leaves. Employees accrue sick days throughout their employment with the District. The quantity of benefit days allocated to employees and the flexibility of carrying over unused sick days provide reasonable support for employee leaves. Additionally, if an employee has worked in the District for 12 months on a full time basis, they are entitled to use FMLA for qualifying situations. FMLA allows them to take unpaid leave for up to 12 work-weeks in a 12-month period and be able to return to their same or equivalent job. As a working mother, I welcomed the FMLA enactment in 1993. My children were born prior to this new labor law. Each childbirth leave came with no guarantee of me returning to a position. FLMA gives workers who require leave important protection.

Working for large global corporations, I was able to observe the benefits offered to employees outside of the US. I was grateful for the 6 weeks paid leave I received for each of my children and the ability to apply accumulated vacation days, but compared to other countries, we are far behind in supporting new parents. I am generally supportive of the concept of parental leave, however, a business making a decision to offer this needs to analyze the complete set of benefits provided to their employees. For example, the number of benefit days, or the carry over policies on benefit days, should be reviewed and possibly changed if moving to a paid parental leave policy. Also, financial impact needs to be carefully understood.

2. **Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

Our district is very diverse with over 115 different languages used in our student's homes and more than half the students identifying as a racial minority. I was elected to the District 204 school board in 2017. While serving on the board, to ensure a welcoming and nurturing environment for all our students, we grew the District equity focus. To build top level guidance, the Board created a District equity statement and goals and even got a state level position passed related to equity. Other significant actions included, approving a cabinet level equity position, updating curriculums and materials to ensure inclusive representation of our diverse community, improving the diversity of our staff, and increasing under-represented populations in high-school advanced placement

(AP) classes. These efforts need to continue. I would like to see increased attention on ways to intervene at early ages to address academic gaps.

As a board member I am committed to collaborating with the administration to develop a strategic framework and process for the creation of a long-term equity plan. We made this one of our 5 board goals for the year. I not only want to see this created, but also will drive plan implementation.

I will examine district decisions through an equity lens to identify and remove barriers ensuring the ability to nurture, grow and celebrate each of our students.

District 204 equity is an ongoing journey. I commit to continue being an active, engaged board member striving to create an environment that eliminates disparities and embraces our diversity.

- 3. Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?**

The District strives to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, but there is continual room for improvement. Over the years I have been on the board, academic performance gaps have been a persistent topic of discussion. Marginal progress has been made. We need to eliminate our gaps and remove barriers blocking student success. New, innovative approaches to reach students and inspire them to achieve their best should be pursued. For example, a couple years ago we identified an issue with under-representation of some student populations in high school advanced placement (AP) classes. There is a strong correlation between taking AP classes in high school and a student continuing to college. To address this situation, we took a new proactive approach to identify and encourage under-represented student enrollment in AP classes. This effort has been a great success for the district.

To further focus on equity, I would like to see specific school improvement plans with measured objectives related to targeted student populations. I believe we need more focus on early intervention and engagement. Similar to the AP HS situation, I see our advanced learning track for elementary students (Project Arrow) has under-represented populations. We need to examine this situation and identify plans to evolve the program. I will continue to advocate for programs focused on younger ages to identify struggling students and alter potential future outcomes.

I believe the District has done a good job on addressing the digital divide. Our District was in the forefront of rolling out technology to our students. Over the time I have been on the board, we had a multi-year plan to place chromebooks in our students' hands. To support students who lacked internet (and to conserve District funding), we pursued and were awarded a grant from Sprint as part of the "1 million Project". This grant allowed us

to supply hotspots to students who lacked internet service, allowing them full, no cost, data connectivity. Our District was one of the first in the State of Illinois to get approval for remote learning. We received this approval a year prior to the pandemic to eliminate our need to take days off for events like a snow day. When the Governor ordered schools to move to remote this past March, District 204, unlike many others, was prepared.

**For more information on my school board experience, career leading large global teams, and extensive volunteer work please visit my website:
lauriedonahuefor204.com**

Allison Fosdick

- 1. What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

I believe our district's maternity leave should be expanded from the current six paid weeks of leave to eight weeks of paid leave. I also support paid paternity leave in our district.

During the pandemic, we should of course continue to offer partially paid leave via FFRCA and the CARES act where it applies. Any additional paid leave should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Most teachers and teacher assistants can utilize FMLA for unpaid leave (running concurrently with a paid maternity leave if applicable) as well.

- 2. Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

I believe D204 is on its way to becoming a more welcoming and inclusive district. We have a very strong community in the Parent Diversity Advisory Council, which advocates for equity and diversity. Our schools celebrate multicultural events, offer various cultural clubs, and provide some opportunities to learn more about other cultures.

I think we need to work on our level of socio-economic inclusivity, as well as accepting gender identities. One way we can work on actively broadening our socio-economic acceptance is by offering more low or no-cost extracurricular activities. By lowering or erasing the barriers that prevent some students from participating, we are demonstrating our commitment to equity for all students, regardless of socio-economic situation.

Providing single, all-gender bathrooms or private locker room space if possible is one way we could assure students of all gender identities that we welcome them. Another way could grow our inclusiveness is to make pronoun identification (especially in written correspondence) the norm rather than the exception.

3. **Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?**

I feel the district's recent adoption of the equity belief statement as well as increased focus on equity in all areas speaks to our level of commitment on this topic. One way we've been addressing this is by actively working to identify students of color and/or low-income students who would benefit from participation in honors or AP courses. Making sure to increase academic and extra-curricular opportunities for underrepresented students is another way we can work to meet the needs of ALL of our students, regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic background or learning challenges.

Saba Haider

1. **What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

The paid leave policy in our school district is comparable to the policies in other similar school districts in the area. The workload of the teachers and other staff members has increased manifold during the pandemic. They have to balance increased pressures of work, while dealing with a pandemic themselves and keeping their families and themselves safe. There was a lot of quick learning and creativity involved for teachers to be able to teach online. Making sure that we support them and provide them all the tools that they need, is of utmost importance.

Yes, we should have paid parental leave. The US is the only OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) country without a national statutory paid maternity, paternity or parental leave. We should have policies that support parents of newborn children. We need to have equity and opportunity for everyone to support their family and their career. So yes, we should have paid parental leave which will improve the workplace environment by increasing employee morale, retention and productivity.

2. **Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

School district 204 is rapidly changing with 40% white, 33% Asian, 12% Hispanic and 9% Black population. Our policies, programs and available resources should be reflective of the population of the district. Having moved here 13 years ago with my husband, and being first generation Indian-American parents raising kids in district 204, I found a community that was welcoming, safe and diverse. As a mother of two elementary and middle school kids, these were values I have always been grateful to have as I raise my family.

The district has done a good job of moving in the direction of being inclusive and welcoming towards diverse groups. However, much work is needed to be done to provide better policies, programs, platforms and opportunities to under-privileged children, minorities, and students of all gender identities. We have to make sure that ALL our students feel safe, welcome and included.

This can be achieved by establishing a strong channel of communication among all members of the community. Giving teachers effective and tangible tools to implement equity in education is of the utmost importance. Teaching tolerance, bias-free language and social engagement campaigns at the middle and high school levels are the need of the hour.

We need to find ways to keep each student engaged and learning. One of the best ways to achieve this is to implement project-based learning and real-life scenarios that children can apply their knowledge towards. We should also incorporate books that reflect the diversity of our community and its practices.

- 3. Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?**

Our school district mission for educational equity clearly and firmly states that educational practices, policies, curricula, resources, and school cultures are to be formulated and implemented keeping in mind not only race, sex, gender, national origin, linguistic diversity, but ALSO on the basis of their abilities and religious affiliation.

However, the pandemic has revealed gaps that have been there in our community for decades but are brought to the surface now. The immediate challenge that the district faces is to make sure that all students are able to have access to quality education during remote/hybrid learning. Making sure that we take care of our students that have food insecurities, limited WIFI, or duties at home. Students who need mental health support, speech and occupational therapy and students with special needs. We need to make sure that we provide and continue to take care of these students who are most at risk.

The second challenge is a long-term challenge. Now that we know what these gaps are in our community, taking steps to fill these gaps and learn from this experience to better prepare for the future. Create a robust plan for effective Implementation of the policies and programs in the future so that we take care of our most vulnerable.

We should also invest in technological tools to help students stay more engaged socially and emotionally. We will have to find ways to recover stronger, with a renewed sense of responsibility from all members of the community.

Robert O Harris - no contact email

Supna Jain

1. **What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

I believe full-time employees of the district should be given paid parental leave. Pregnancies and adoptions are unpredictable and in many instances can not be planned in accordance to a school calendar. As an educator, in higher education, I am well aware of the sacrifices and stress female educators experience when planning to have children. Some colleagues are able to enjoy spending time with their June born baby, while others are unable to because their child was born during the school year. It is a painful choice between work and family that no one should have to make, but unfortunately many experience.

I am also aware District 204 is facing several financial challenges in the coming years, including a growing student body, operating on a lean budget, and a teacher shortage. These issues are real, and influence the quality of education the district can provide students. As a board member, it will be my duty to protect the quality of education our students receive. In doing so, I must balance the interest of our children, our teachers, while being fiscally responsible.

2. **Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

Overall, I believe District 204 is welcoming to all of our students. This is evident through the number of clubs and activities offered in our high schools such as the American Sign Language Club, Black Student Alliance, Sexuality and Gender Acceptance Club. I am filled with joy when I see the list of activities available to our children that were not available decades ago. Despite this, there is much we can do to improve our district to be more inclusive.

The hiring of Jennifer Rowe at a cabinet level position (Executive Director of Educational Equity), and the recent adoption of the Equity statement, are signs we are moving in the right direction. The next steps are now to put the statement into practice. The district will need to commit to viewing issues with an equity lens, ensuring those affected from stated program/fee/policy, are represented. The board must support Ms. Rowe with the resources she needs to scale her programs across the district.

First, the board must provide ongoing training in implicit bias and culturally responsive pedagogy to teachers and staff members. I personally have benefitted from attending such training programs and have implemented new strategies in my own teaching to be more inclusive (i.e., being mindful of the cost of books I use in my class).

Second, the board should re-examine the K-12 curriculum to be more inclusive by including nontraditional or “hidden” stories. The stories depicted in books and taught in classrooms shape how our children see themselves and the world. As someone who studies gender roles and teaches intercultural communication, this is something I am aware will require effort and commitment from the leaders of the district. Our children have a right to learn a more inclusive and accurate perspective of the world (that include stories of leaders from marginalized groups) and the district has a duty to provide that.

Lastly, the district must make a concerted effort to hire and retain educators/staff members that reflect the diversity of our district. Although challenging, these measures will ensure our students feel included in our system and will prepare them to thrive in an increasingly diverse world. Representation matters. I believe there is a lot that we can do and I will certainly support initiatives that ensure our students feel included in their classroom and are prepared for our increasingly diverse world.

3. Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?

When you have systemic hierarchies placed throughout society it is no surprise that it would exist within the education system. We know for decades through research that there are statistically significant differences in scores and graduation rates for certain groups (i.e., Black, Hispanic and ELL students). The cause of this difference can in large part be attributed to resource disparities.

The solution to narrowing the gap, is to use an equity lens when making decisions. In addition to re-examining the K-12 curriculum, and training our instructors in culturally responsive pedagogy, we must offer access to supplemental educational opportunities (i.e., tutoring, summer schooling, ACT/SAT prep courses, college application tutorials, internships) that will address resource disparities and aid in narrowing the achievement gap. Although the district is providing many of these services, many students may require more, or may be overlooked due to the additional stress the pandemic has caused on learning and mental health.

We must also commit to providing our special needs students with the resources needed to successfully participate in classroom and other school activities. This has been increasingly more difficult during the pandemic. Hence the district will need to be relentless in their outreach efforts to ensure students feel included and don't fall behind. Such efforts may extend beyond the duration of the pandemic and teachers/staff must be supported with the necessary resources to make these outreach efforts successful.

Marina Kosak

- 1. What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

The current contract with the IPEA (Indian Prairie Education Association) allows for a teacher who has been employed with the district for 2 full years to apply for parental leave without pay or benefits. Employees can use sick leave if they have been deemed to have a pregnancy related disability (unable to perform their duties). As long as a teacher works a total of 120 days during a specific school year they will be eligible to advance on the pay scale for the following year. These terms seem to be comparable to surrounding school districts.

With the current financial constraints facing IPSD 204 I do not believe that a paid parental leave beyond the contract terms is feasible at this time. However, looking beyond this current contract (which ends in 2022) if it is legally possible per state guidelines and fiscally possible within the budget I would support an initiative to examine the possibility to include potential paid parental leave for staff. With an ongoing teacher shortage, this type of policy could help attract quality educators to our district.

- 2. Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

One of the best things about IPSD 204 is its diversity. We have 24% of our students that come from a home where another language is spoken beyond English and that includes 115 different languages. IPSD is starting to make great strides in the realm of Equity. They recently authored an Equity Belief Statement that is well written and has been viewed as an example that other districts would like to follow. However, we have to ensure that all of our staff is getting the professional development needed and that as a district we are providing the proper resources to help our teachers implement equity within their classrooms. This would include professional development on Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT). The proper use of CRT has shown that it increases engagement among students by helping them feel connected to themes in the class. It also creates opportunities for conversations on different perspectives of issues and can teach students at a young age the importance of respecting others' opinions.

- 3. Do you feel the district is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the district is adequately addressing the digital divide?**

As a parent of a 2019 NVHS graduate and a current NVHS student I believe that my kids are getting a good education. My 2019 graduate is thriving academically in college and found her passion through the media program in high school. She is now majoring in Creative Media because of the curriculum that was provided to her at NVHS. I think

sometimes we forget that not all of our students are Honors and AP kids and we need to create an environment where ALL students can thrive. The high school diploma that these students leave with has to be meaningful to them. I believe the opportunities exist for our students, however, as parents have to support their decisions and guide them accordingly. So many times we hear of IPSD high school students being overwhelmed because of all of the honor and AP courses that they are taking and they don't get the opportunity to take those classes that really interest them. Every student is different and I believe that each of them will achieve their full potential if given the right path for them.

I believe it is important that as a district we are also looking at the achievement gap. This refers to any significant disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students. (It is important to note that the achievement gap is the end result while the opportunity gap is the unequal distribution of resources.) When looking at the 2019 District 204 report card (there was no testing in 2020 due to the pandemic) we are not doing well in closing the gap. For example on the IAR (Illinois Assessment of Readiness grades 3-8) in Math the discrepancy between the White students and the Hispanic students in 204 is 27% while the state average is 21%. At the SAT level for ELA the discrepancy between Non-IEP students and IEP students is 51% while the state average is 33%. We need to take a look at the interventions being offered and ask some significant questions in regards to their effectiveness.

Yanmei May Liang

- 1. What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

I think the current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants are not the best but acceptable, since the policies were made according to the Illinois School Code. If there is a paid parental leave for teachers who deliver baby during school year, will it be fair for the teachers whose due date are in summer break? Or should they also get extra 6-week salaries? Therefore, I believe that in order to maintain fairness, there should not be an additional paid paternal leave unless District 204 has sufficient surplus funds, which I will then support it under the state laws.

- 2. Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

Yes, I believe so. As a small group leader for Moms in Prayers International, I have prayed with moms in District 204 for over seven years. Some moms were new immigrants and their children were English Language Learner participants. I had also been a close friend with an ELL student for over two years. From talking with these individuals, I believe the educators of District 204 have made a conscious effort to make sure students feel welcome and included.

- 3. Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or**

advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?

I would like to say that IPSD 204 has done a good job trying to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement. However, I think there is still room to improve. Due to tight funding in District 204, I will promote to redistribute resources inside school according to the characteristics of each group of students. I will suggest bigger-size classes with small supporting groups for AP students to cultivate self-learning ability and save expenses. However, I will support sufficient teachers for ELL and special need students.

District 204's strong efforts in equitable opportunity is also seen in their efforts to fight the digital divide. This district has prioritized plans for a digital transformation to prepare students for the future. One of the plans was to provide laptops for students. Last year District 204 also had a partnership with the 1Million Project Foundation to provide free wireless hotspots for hundreds of needed high school students. Therefore, I think District 204 is adequately addressing the digital divide.

Rajesh Narayan - no response

Kader Sakkaria - no response

Susan Taylor-Demming

- 1. What is your position on current paid leave policies for teachers and teacher assistants in our school district? Do you feel there should be a paid parental leave?**

I feel IPSD 204's current paid policies are very generous and understanding regarding leave during unprecedented times for our teachers. Our Sick Leave policies, currently at twelve days would be advantageous if we were able to provide 3 more for a total of 15, but I am grateful that we were able to negotiate a beneficial and forward thinking agreement that was so beneficial for our teachers, allowing them to take extended days if required. We do allow for both IPEA and IPCA staff, a number of categories for extended days - bereavement, business leave days. I am pleased negotiation included the accommodation of paid business days for both IPEA and IPCA staff. I would like to see us be able to offer a minimum number of paid parental leave days.

Parental leave could be extremely beneficial to staff and if there are other areas where negotiation can occur and a loss in a particular area that may not mean as much could be up for discussion. I would like to see negotiation occur for paid parental leave inclusion.

- 2. Do you feel District 204 is welcoming and inclusive to students of a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and gender identities? If not, how do you feel this could be rectified?**

Our district has been at the forefront in the state in discussing the need for inclusivity for students and staff from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic and gender identities. We were one of the first districts to have a Director Of Diversity and Inclusivity and in fact our original director was hired at the county level as their initial director in that role. Our recognition of the importance of inclusiveness, led us to establish the Parent Diversity Advisory Council (PDAC) in 2002 and it continues as a vibrant part of our district to this day. One of the promises of PDAC is to ensure all families and students feel welcomed in our district. Yet, as many positive steps as we have taken, there is still more work to be done and the board has taken an active role in promoting equity in our district. We have begun the steps with our district Equity Statement but are committed to involving all district constituents in a strategic process to enhance equity throughout our district. This will be a long-term endeavor to ensure it is meaningful, lasting and impactful throughout IPSD 204.

- 3. Do you feel the District is providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, learning needs or advanced achievement or has there been evidence of opportunity hoarding? Do you feel the school district is adequately addressing the digital divide?**

Our district annually looks at the Opportunity Academic Gap that exists in our district and that is important. Yet, we have not taken the steps to set a quantifiable goal to address the Gap. We are finally challenging our administration to do just that. We have begun the work with our Equity Statement and 2 years ago we began an initiative at the high school level to increase the number of underrepresented students in Honors and AP classes. The goal is not just to put more students in the classes, but to ensure they are provided with the tools for their success. We must continue to focus on our underrepresented population from preK-12. We are bringing more students in at the preK level and that is crucial as well. Our Steps program is well recognized for helping our young adults who face social, emotional, mental and/or physical challenges move to the educational/workforce paths that will prepare them for sustainable avenues once they are past 22 years of age.