



**AAUW Naperville Area
Candidate Questionnaire**

**Consolidated Election
April 4, 2023**

**Indian Prairie Community Unit School District 204
Board of Education Candidates
(alphabetical order)
Vote for 3**

1. [Catey Genc](#)
2. [Justin Karubas](#)
3. [Mark Rising](#)

Methodology

We emailed all candidates and invited them to answer questions relevant to AAUW public policy priorities and the position the candidates are seeking. We sent follow-up reminders and collated all the responses. Candidates' responses have not been edited. Candidates who did not respond are indicated as "No response received."

Catey Genc

Social Media: <https://www.facebook.com/CateyGenc4204Board>

1. Are you satisfied with the district's implementation of the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act and the district's general sex education and health education? Please describe the program strengths or needed improvements.

As a parent with two sons in the district I have personally experienced what is taught to them in health depending on the grade they are in. That does now include more sex education as they are in 8th and 11th grade. I have not found any subject matter to be inappropriate for their age. I know that the district has been navigating the parameters of the new law passed and are still making decisions about the health and sex education program as more information is received. Currently it is the same as it has been since my oldest started school. The teachers are always transparent about what is being taught and parents and students do have the option to opt out of a lesson at any time. I think that the district does a great job of teaching age-appropriate content in a way that is not intimidating or confusing. It is so important that staff continue to be transparent about their lessons. I do think that it is a program that should be consistently examined to see if new topics should be brought in, or some topics should not be discussed for a certain age group. Curriculum in any subject is always evolving.

2. What is your position on the renewal of the Invest in Kids Scholarship Tax Credit Program? Do you favor state tax credits or vouchers for use by families to send children to private schools? If so, how do you feel this affects public schools?

I believe that public schools and private schools were created for very specific purposes. I do not favor the idea of vouchers for use by families to send their child to private school. The understanding has always been that if you are sending your child to private school then you as the parent/guardian are responsible for paying the tuition. The specific schools can work out tuition issues on a child-by-child basis. That is a valid choice for parents if that is what they prefer to do. I think that public schools should continue to receive the funding that they have through our tax dollars. Public schools offer such a wide variety of services to try to suit every child's need and give them the best chance to succeed. D204 has a funding issue already so the idea that more money could be taken away from our public schools is not acceptable to me. The public school system works so hard to educate everybody and give all of the community an opportunity to learn and grow. The programs offered whether it is music or art or athletics or STEM or robotics or so many other programs that bring children together and let them pursue their passion! Public schools are so important to our society.

3. Do you believe the current paid leave policy for employees in your district is appropriate? What, if any, changes would you implement in the number of weeks of paid leave and the purposes for which it could be used?

As I understand it both employment groups agreed to a contract with the Board in 2022 and I have heard that the teachers were very happy with the outcome including paid leave. I will be new to the board so the many specifics are still being learned. I do know that there was an increase in paid leave allowed throughout the year for a variety of reasons which I believe is more than fair.

4. What, if any, is the role of the board in the selection of materials for school libraries and curriculum development?

I think that when the board hires a superintendent it is with the knowledge that the superintendent along with other administration and staff can look at these issues and discuss it with the board as needed. I feel the board is many things including a support system for administration and staff. As they come up with suggestions for curriculum development, I do think that a discussion with the board at that point is helpful as things like budgets need to be considered. As far as selection of materials for school libraries, I would say that is the role of school staff and administration. If issues arise the board will hear about it and a discussion can occur at that point.

5. What actions would you recommend to encourage the inclusion of female students and underrepresented groups in the most challenging STEM classes?

I think that our district is a very inclusive one, but there is always room for progress. I do know that we are taking steps currently to have more children included in advanced classes that have an aptitude for the subject. Looking at the whole child and not just test scores is a great way to find children that might belong in a more challenging class. I like that the staff in 204 really does try to bring out the best in every child which gives more opportunities for growth and advancement. Students that need specific help or accommodations can be in more challenging classes too if they are given the right tools. I do think that it is nice that females are being recognized for their aptitude in math, science and technology more and more. I believe if we can continue to build on the progress we are already making that will make a huge difference.

Justin Karubas

Website: <https://justinkarubas204.com/>

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1. Are you satisfied with the district's implementation of the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act and the district's general sex education and health education? Please describe the program strengths or needed improvements.

Yes. Our district decided to neither adopt nor oppose, but defer. I personally support nearly all of the standards and look forward to hearing a recommendation to the board from the administration in the near future. Our district is a large unit district with an average spending per pupil below the state average, and our history and practice are to allow curriculum and instruction to develop from teacher and administration collaboration prior to coming to the board. By doing so, there is more fidelity in the actual teaching in all of the classrooms. This will be more impactful to the students and continues ongoing positive relations with the teachers.

2. What is your position on the renewal of the Invest in Kids Scholarship Tax Credit Program? Do you favor state tax credits or vouchers for use by families to send children to private schools? If so, how do you feel this affects public schools?

Public money should go to public schools. Any funding by the state to private schools takes away from public schools that are already under funded according to the Evidenced Based Funding formula. As a compromise position, I'm willing to allow a limited extension of the Act, both in duration and dollar amount, if the private school qualifies under the Act by complying with the provisions of federal and state laws applicable to public schools pertaining to special education and the instruction of English learners, the provisions of the Illinois Humans Rights Act concerning public accommodations and educational institutions, and the provisions of the state law related to transparency such as the Freedom of Information Act, Open Meetings Act, testing and reporting. If public money must go to private schools, then private schools must become more public.

3. Do you believe the current paid leave policy for employees in your district is appropriate? What, if any, changes would you implement in the number of weeks of paid leave and the purposes for which it could be used?

Yes. Our board has a history of a great relationship with the teachers. Our board is very transparent in our finances. Typically, our negotiations involve offering a fixed amount of money that is available for the teacher contract and would allow us to balance the

budget. Then the teachers are empowered to decide where to apply the funds on the contract whether to salaries, class size, health benefits or leave. My role as a board member is to not choose the employee benefit that is most important to the teachers, but empower them to make that decision.

4. What, if any, is the role of the board in the selection of materials for school libraries and curriculum development?

It is the policy of our board that administration makes a recommendation to the board for the adoption of all textbooks, instructional material, curriculum and expenditures. This allows the board to be transparent and fiscally responsible. There is obviously great deference given to the subject matter experts such as the librarians, teachers, staff and administration. And, I think the law in Illinois needs to be rethought in this area because instructional material is not just a textbook, but can include a webpage or video clip. And board work and classroom instruction would grind to a halt if each web click or tap on a phone required review and approval. There is a process for parents to review the instructional material and curriculum. There is also a process for parents to file complaints or raise concerns. Additionally, there are options for parents to exclude their student from certain instructional material and curriculum.

5. What actions would you recommend to encourage the inclusion of female students and underrepresented groups in the most challenging STEM classes?

I struggle with this one. The same imbalance presents itself in AP classes and in other areas. My concern is taking away the personal agency of the students in choosing their path. There are no restrictions on signing up for the classes except for prerequisites. We already have a number of club and robotics tournaments. We are an under resourced district and if students are pushed into a class without the proper supports, then this may cause attendance, behavior and mental health issues. What role does a board play in determining which classes are imbalanced and then seeking to balance them? One student may want to prioritize the arts. A student may need to use the public schools to advance in AP classes so that they can afford college. Another student may want to study in the construction trades, cosmetology, HVAC, and nursing assistant training. Yet another student may want to focus on transportation technology because their family owns an auto repair shop. My role as a board member is to focus the system on inspiring each student to achieve their greatest potential. In doing so, barrier reduction is important. Ultimately, I would encourage student agency.

Mark Rising

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1. Are you satisfied with the district's implementation of the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act and the district's general sex education and health education? Please describe the program strengths or needed improvements.

I support our current D204 implementation of the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act. Our current comprehensive sex and health education aligns to what is mandated by the state and is adapted to meet our local and age/developmentally appropriate needs based on our community and district demographics. Our current program includes parent notification, schedule of instruction, parent resources, transparency of instruction, and the flexibility for parents to opt their students out of instruction.

Our health educators have remained diligent over many years in ensuring we maintain a comprehensive and age/developmentally appropriate curriculum at 5th, 6th-8th, and 10th grades (11th and 12th grades if a student takes advanced health). Where we are currently working on improvements is to make sure our curriculum and strands are aligned across all our schools. For further information please reference our September 12, 2022 board meeting.

2. What is your position on the renewal of the Invest in Kids Scholarship Tax Credit Program? Do you favor state tax credits or vouchers for use by families to send children to private schools? If so, how do you feel this affects public schools?

The first item in my Oath of Office for School Board Member is "I shall respect taxpayer interests by serving as a faithful protector of the school district's assets." Currently, D204 is 84% adequately funded. IL as a state underfunds public education as compared to other states and their total percentage of funding that the state contributes towards education. In turn, Illinois has very high property taxes because the State relies on residents' property taxes to supplement public education funding. It will currently take more than 10+ years for D204 to be fully funded if Illinois public education funding remains the same.

Currently the Invest in Kids Scholarship Tax Credit Program takes \$75M dollars yearly out of the Illinois General Fund that could be used to additionally fund public education. I DO NOT support the renewal of this program as it keeps our district further away from

adequate funding and keeps the pressure on our residential property taxpayers. Furthermore, people primarily move to our area because of D204 and our #2 ranked Best IL K-12 school district, and our #36 ranked Best US K-12 school district. Not funding our school district adequately hurts our students, our taxpayers, our schools, and our home values.

3. Do you believe the current paid leave policy for employees in your district is appropriate? What, if any, changes would you implement in the number of weeks of paid leave and the purposes for which it could be used?

In 2022, our Board and our two (IPEA & IPCA) union associations agreed to a 4-year employment contract. The Board is very thankful that we have always had an open and supportive relationship with our staff and their associations. I believe it is the reason Indian Prairie School District was ranked the #33 Best Place to Work in Illinois. No other school district was in the Top 50.

I am pleased to say in 2022 we increased our paid sick leave from 12 to 13 days. In addition, we modified our birth or adoption of a child and bereavement leave. As one board member I am always open to hearing additional options of how we can best support our staff once we negotiate a new contract in 2026.

4. What, if any, is the role of the board in the selection of materials for school libraries and curriculum development?

All D204 school district approved curriculum materials align to or exceed Illinois curriculum standards. This includes all textbooks (hard copy or digital) required novels, and student workbooks. The Board of Education receives a presentation on the proposed materials regarding the evaluation process, curation process, and process for the community to review the curriculum before adoption (typically 30 days). Additional library materials and supplemental learning materials are available to students at the discretion of the librarians and teachers. I am in agreement with our current practice.

In addition, Policy 6:210 recently discussed at our January 23rd, 2023 board meeting says the following: *The Superintendent shall recommend to the Board for consideration and adoption all textbooks and primary instructional materials and shall include the following information: (1) title, publisher, copyright dates, number of copies desired, and cost; (2) any texts being replaced; and (3) rationale for recommendation. The School Code governs the adoption and purchase of textbooks and instructional materials.*

5. What actions would you recommend to encourage the inclusion of female students and underrepresented groups in the most challenging STEM classes?

I can speak on this not only as a current school board member, but as a father of two daughters who are pursuing STEM careers because of D204. In addition, just recently went to our MS Robotics programs and it was very diverse in student representation with almost half being female.

We are very fortunate in D204 to be very encouraging of both females and underrepresented groups to be involved in our STEM classes, Girls Coding Club, GEMS (girls in engineering, math, science) Club, Project Lead The Way (engineering track curriculum) Robotics, and AP and Honors Programs. In 2016 we implemented Equal Opportunity Schools in D204 which seeks to identify underrepresented students and encourages them to take Honors or AP courses and offers them academic supports.

Where I think we can always make improvements is additional information and resources for students and parents about these programs, what D204 has available, and what careers are available in a STEM future.