**What are your key reasons for running for school board this year? \***

I have a number of reasons for running for the EKES school board this year. I’ve had one daughter go from K 🡪 5th at EKES and two more children currently in the 3rd grade. I feel I know many of the successes the school has had in the past and challenges that this school faces in its present. The following items are topics that drove me to run for this position:

* **School Finances** 🡪 The board and the administration needs to better translate EKES’s financial position and budget for the residents. I feel a great deal of the anger and frustration people feel towards our finances is due to misunderstandings of state financial requirements (such as the NH Retirement system) as well as contractual and state education mandates. If all stakeholders have a better understanding of the financial needs and obligations of the school, then a true discussion on budget preparation and funding use can be had. There has also been a great deal of discussion regarding per-student costs and declining enrollment in the SAU overall, and while I don’t always believe these are the only methods by which to look at the budget (as many times school comparisons by these finances are not directly comparable), they can certainly be an important factor that should be acknowledged and recognized as part of the budgeting process.
* **Working Parents** 🡪 For years, it has felt that EKES forgets that many families have two working parents. I would like to help these families feel more included during discussions throughout the school year. Today, most families with young children in our SAU still do not have child-care, two years into the pandemic (as the YMCA could not create programs in 5 of our schools this year), causing a lot of extra burden on families with young children.
* **Academic Reporting** 🡪 I would like to change how academics are reported to parents at EKES. The SAU, although well intentioned, has failed to translate their changes in curriculum into a measurable or understandable reporting system for families. The current report cards at EKES fail to successfully report anything of value to the parents, apart from the custom narrative written by teachers for each student. The expectation and demand that parents adapt to new and difficult-to-understand grading systems or “I can” statements has resulted in years of confusion and anger from many parents. Qualitative or historically understood guidelines assistant parents in better understanding early indicators of their students’ struggles.

In addition, the attitude toward standardized testing has changed in academia in recent years despite the fact that it still acts as the metric for the state of New Hampshire and the Department of Education to measure student achievement and by which parents can easily compare academics between school systems. EKES needs to utilize the testing accordingly and better prepare the students for these exams until other methodologies are more universally utilized state-wide.

* A Focus on Education - There has been a great deal of pushback from parents for a refocus on academics as well as a push for more “logical” classes (for older students: how and why you pay taxes, how to balance your checkbook). I know the school’s focus (both at EKES and SAU16-wide) has been a more “whole child” approach. There are parts of this approach I think are wonderful and some I believe are pulling too much attention away from our core subjects.

Within EKES, I love that my children have had to apply for their class “jobs” that they want in the classroom (they fill out a little application, having to include a personal reference). I also love that the children are given more freedom and choices in some of their learning approaches, as I have twins with two VERY different learning styles and strengths.

With that said, there is a noticeable academic deficit in our children from the past two years – especially in younger children. To move forward and truly help these kids I think we do need a refocus back on some of the topics that many of them missed in the past two years. I believe we have taken a great first step towards this with the inclusion of a math interventionist in our EKES Budget for the next fiscal year.

I would also like the SAU to look into a grant for a second reading specialist. I have heard from a multitude of frustrated parents that that our one reading specialist is overwhelmed and unable to keep up with current student needs. Parents should feel that their children are not only receiving the proper instruction but the correct amount of help – and we do not have the help to do that at this time.

* **Develop Policies that Require Goals and Objectives for non-standard academic items** 🡪 It is important for our schools to teach our children in a variety of methods and on a variety of topics. Traditional academic subjects (reading/writing, math, science, language, STEM, art, phys ed, etc.) which contain measurable objectives are clearly our main objectives. EKES also features the ability for students to gain life skills through other teachers/lesson plans, especially through Competency Based Education

It would aid the parents in understanding in these non-standard lesson plans if the SAU posted Goals and Objectives for these non -standard academic paths as they do for the standard classes. (EKES has done this with their Social Emotional Learning objectives this year through better communication with the parents to impart what is being taught).

At the end of the day, I feel we all want to have well-rounded students. I believe a lot of parents’ frustrations stem from a lack of communication from the SAU. A lack of information leads to speculation, misinformation and mistrust which does not positively affect our student’s future academic success in any way.

* **Build and Environment of Conversation, Compromise and Respect** 🡪 As one of my favorite foodie’s, Anthony Bourdain once said, “I don’t have to agree with you to like you or respect you.”

It is my understanding, and my personal feeling, that much of the current anger towards the administration is due to a lack of consistent communication from the schools. I know, as fellow parents and taxpayers, we all strive to work and raise our children in a respectful atmosphere. Although understandable, the resulting anger and frustration that has translated to yelling or disrespectful language /behavior which should not be the norm at school board meetings and certainly not behavior we would want our children to model. I would like meetings to be an environment of respectful discussion (on both sides) as we are all members of the same community and are all here to try to do what is best for the children of East Kingston/SAU16. I would like to develop methods by which constituents can better submit questions and gain responses from the board and/or the administration. It is my hope that this ability to gain answers will defuse some of the anger and return our community to an environment of respectful conversation. We can disagree and still communicate – in fact, many times this is how we all best learn and grow from one-another. We all have different backgrounds, areas of expertise and life experiences and thus unique perspectives. If we can bring these together into a respectful and honest conversation, we can move the school in a forward direction.

* **School Start Time** 🡪 I would like to re-review this study done by the SAU – I believe that our start times for younger and older students would be improved through a shift in start times.
* **SAU16 Pride**  🡪 I’m hoping we can all soon be proud of our school system again. I’d like to be part of that change.

**What do you see as the key challenges facing the school district and what do you hope to change or impact? \***

The SAU16 District has a lot of challenges but also has the advantage of having a great collection of parents and residents who both support and challenge the district. It is through both of these passions that true improvement and greatness can be found, as long as both sides agree to be respectful, truly listen (with an open mind) and be willing to work together. Here are what I see as the primary challenges to the current state of EKES and SAU16:

* Funding Challenges – like all municipalities in the state of New Hampshire, the only funding schools receive from the state is based off of the current “adequacy” formula, which has legally been deemed inadequate. The state also mandates that the school fund the teacher portion of the NH retirement system, despite the towns having no say as to its oversight or funding amounts. The state chose to stop contributing to this fund a number of years ago, also downshifting a great deal of burden onto the local school districts. Schools are having to fight for local funding from frustrated residents simply to keep schools operational, and if/when schools are closed due to a lack of funding, students have to be tuitioned to outside towns. In the event of a school closure, taxpayers foot a bill for student tuition over which they have no control (no voting rights on a budget for another town) and have to send children to a school over which they have no say. School cooperatives have been built to help the towns relieve the financial burden of running their own independent school district, but cooperatives also feature a lot of frustrations for residents.
* Different Ideals for a Child’s Education – As parents became more involved in their children’s education throughout the pandemic, I feel a greater divide began to grow between what teachers/school administrators felt was ideal educational content and what parents felt was necessary content. I believe both sides have valid points and its finding a compromise which does not compromise our children’s education which is our greatest challenge.
* Declining Enrollment – The State of New Hampshire has had a declining number of young families due to a lack of affordable housing and childcare. The SAU has seen this trend, overall, meaning that schools are faced with a decline in students and an increase in taxpayers without a stake in the school system – and this builds barriers between the communities. EKES has been fortunate in that its enrollment has been steady in the past 4-5 years but it is a trend of which we have to be aware.
* The “System” – There is a challenge to change how processes move forward, how money moves or how staff are compensated, and more simply based on laws and practices in place at a level that is out of reach of the SAU or the board. It doesn’t mean that desired outcomes are necessarily out of reach but that their immediate change is difficult without support from enabling legislation. There are innately some items that will have to be funded a certain way, or mandated costs, or contractual items or meeting processes that must occur in a specified time or manner. With that said, the board should try to make it known when change is simply out of their control and empower stakeholders to approach avenues by which their concerns or frustrations can affect true change.
* Cultural Change – We live in a nation/world of anger and fear and mistrust in one another. Simple respect and decorum have been challenged and replaced with profanity laced outbursts and a lack of courtesy, compassion or consideration for one another as people and as neighbors. I am grateful that the majority of my interactions with my fellow residents of New Hampshire have continued to be respect-filled conversations, whether or not we agree on a topic but I sometimes see this cultural shift, even in our little corner of the world.

**The School District Budget is always heavily discussed and debated. What changes are necessary to the budget and the budget process if any? \***

I think the biggest reason there is a lot of the anger and frustration that we see in the budget is that it is POORLY communicated to the public (both the process and the budget itself). The process is seriously complex with a limit on the areas that are able to be changed– but these items are not well illustrated.

* The budget and its funding is more difficult to change than most people understand. The budget process itself is regulated by state laws and local agreements (as far as deliberative, public hearing, timelines, etc.). I believe a primary goal for the SAU should be to better educate the public on this topic and have a graphic of the budget timeline for all portions of the SAU.
* An annual budget survey would be a great way to get a better community “feel” for wants and needs of the community (the outreach should be to as many constituents as possible). These surveys would help advise the budget committee and the board what their community feels/wants for the school. This does not mean every constituent will get what they want from the budget, but it will give every resident the opportunity to be heard by the board and the administration.
* The SAU administration budget needs to be better understood (what is in it and how it is distributed to each of the schools). I would like to see all contracts for administration positions posted on the school’s website (if they are already, I have not been able to locate them).
* I do believe that the intermingling of the SAU central office budget, the coop budget and the individual schools budgets and their effect on the tax rate all become very confusing and overwhelming to residents leading to cuts in unfortunate places. This should be better explained and illustrated.
* The state needs to step up and better fund public education. The current adequacy formula was deemed inadequate by the state courts and there has been no new formula passed. NH is one of the only states in the union (AK being the other) that has no income or sales tax, meaning almost all funding is through local property taxes which becomes cost prohibitive to many, especially those on fixed incomes.
* The schools have their hands tied on “musts” for funding. Schools MUST fund transportation, special education, and NH Retirement (among other things) so when cuts are made, they immediately tend to hit the academic and unified arts, which truly punishes the children.
* The current NH Retirement mandate (and lack of funding by the state of NH) and increases have hurt taxpayers and make the budget look astronomical, but not at any fault or hyper spending by the SAU. This system should be better explained by the SAU. Fun fact: Today’s Teacher NH Retirement Rate (what we contribute to the system as taxpayers) is 21.02%. 10 years ago, this rate was 11.30% and 20 years ago it was 3.97%. This is a large increase in the mandated rate by the state. Also? Teachers are paying 7% of their salary to NH Retirement (mandated).

**What is your opinion regarding the policy responses to Covid and what, if anything, would you change? \***

* I do not believe the school administration was as forthcoming with information nor were they consistent with their use of statistics and rationale throughout the pandemic. It is vital that in emergency situations the decision making metrics be made clear and consistent so that decisions are predictable and understandable. A lack of clear information leads to anger, mistrust and mis-information as does deviations from this rationale.
* The lack of true support for kids that were out due to quarantine or COVID was frustrating and led to gaps in the children’s education. Personally, I thank my children’s teachers who stepped up (despite the policy of no help/work) to check in on them during their available time and send home work as possible during quarantines they experienced. Many of these children were home as a precaution and not ill (and bored) and lost opportunities to learn through remote or other options.
* I do believe that the SAU should have been faster to admit that students were struggling and have faced “academic loss” from being out of the classrooms (or being in inadequate classroom settings) – there are some settings in which this fact is still not admitted by teachers or administrators.
* I can imagine that the goal of the current board would be to reduce COVID-19 related requirements and changes as the weather turns to spring, as numbers decline in our area, vaccination rates increase and staffing returns to consistently healthy levels in our SAU. From what my children tell me, many COVID policies originally in place have already started to relax. I hope in the upcoming year we can return to more “normalcy” including allowing parents back into the buildings, volunteers, and hopefully, mask-free.
* I feel the need to note: I can’t pretend to say I would know what I would have done if I was on the board a year or two ago in regards to COVID responses. I have a background in science and as an EMT and I can honestly say, this pandemic has been a very different experience for all involved and part of the healing process is to understand and admit that our knowledge base and experiences are not the same as those around us. Those who have lost family to COVID-19 or who have a health susceptible child are going to feel very differently than someone who has been more fortunate, disease-wise - untouched by the virus – and have been affected more in a financial or activity availability manner. We truly need to listen (really listen) to each other and try to find common ground on which we can all work.

**What do you feel is driving the current level of animosity in interactions between the school board, the administration, and the public, and what, if any, steps can/should be taken to lower the level of tension? \***

* I believe a lot of animosity in our SAU is due to two basic items:
  1. **A lack of Effective Communication** – This is the biggest issue and one I hope to work through with the SAU as part of the EKES board. It is my feeling from the constituency that they do not feel heard. There are numerous avenues by which the school and the SAU can give and receive information. This information must not only be timely but CONSISTENT. The EK board should develop a communications policy for the administration and staff to ensure questions are being answered in an appropriate amount of time. A potential method for Q&A, through the board meeting/public hearing process lends to some possibilities. The board has public hearings but the public is craving a method by which they can get immediate answers to questions. In municipalities, most public hearing forums do not typically lend to an immediate answer by the administration or board and this is standard practice, but the SAU boards have inconsistently chosen to depart from this practice. I believe that there would be a place in our SAU for scheduled “discussion” sessions but only if all parties were to agree to discuss in a respectful manner.
  2. **Respect goes Both Ways** - Yelling, screaming and disrespectful language would not lend to increased communication from the SAU. Yes, the SAU needs to be more responsive to emails, overall. Yes, the SAU needs to be more responsive and forthcoming in response to questions, overall. It is understood by all that we are all frustrated and “done” right now. But, yes, we can all behave like adults and act as an example to our children. It should to be understood that not all responses from the board or administration are going to agree with a person’s point of view. Please remember that all of our board members are volunteers and our neighbors, whether we agree with them or not, we all need to act in a manner that we would be proud to show to our children. As long as exchanges are truthful and respectful, one would hope that all involved would feel this is positive progress.

**What would you use as a model to gauge academic success? \***

* I don’t believe any one test or model is best to gauge “success” but I do also believe that placement exams and assessments have their place in our schools and should be better communicated to the parents and community. Like many, I was frustrated with the school’s lack of response over the decline in academic success (as measured by our state standardized tests) over the past couple of years. All New Hampshire schools have battled COVID-19 and many have not seen the struggles that SAU16 has seen in this manner. The SAU has made some great strides in an effort to include students who learn in a multitude of manners and change how instruction is completed and the board at EKES has started to re-implement math and reading specialists to help regain some ground in these fundamental academic areas.

Academic success cannot be measured from one day or one set of tests but an amalgamation of numerous competency/ status exams, something that is already happening within EKES. The board might be able to explore ways with the staff to utilize reviews/tests that are already in place to display a school wide “litmus test” for academic success of the children overall. As long as we can deliver a qualitative and standardized testing structure (all of the children are testing on the same standards) then we can deliver quantitative measures of academic progress to our parents and the EK taxpayers.

**Would you support the addition of more teachers and para positions? \***

* + Yes
  + No

**Do you believe our SAU has the appropriate number of administrators? \***

* + Yes
  + No

Note: I believe that SAU16 is top-heavy (financially) and that a review of the administrative levels should be completed to review our administration in comparison to other like-sized districts with good-quality education.

**If elected, what approach will you take in responding to parents' questions and concerns as it relates to their children’s educational experiences inside the classroom? \***

* I would try to give all concerns the respectful reading and response that they deserve in as timely a manner as possible. I would also try to pass along questions to the appropriate person within the SAU and try to follow up as possible. The School Board itself does not have direct power over academics but it does have influence over policy and the budget. Input from EKES families and their experiences at EKES as well as that input from taxpayers are vital to better build a budget and a set of policies that reflect our collective needs.

**Do you see yourself primarily as a representative of the community or as a representative of the school system? \***

* + Representative of the community
  + Representative of the school system

**Are you committed to a yearly survey of families, students, community residents, and school staff about what they see as major strengths and shortcomings of the district and its schools? Are you committed to publicly sharing the results? \***

* + Yes I am committed to a yearly survey and yes I am committed to publicly sharing the results
  + Yes I am committed to a yearly survey but I believe the surveys are information for the school board and administrators
  + No I am not committed to a yearly survey
  + Undecided

**What makes you the most qualified person for the school board? \***

* I believe I am one of two qualified candidates. I have a good deal of experience in municipal finance and procedure, making the “learning curve” at the beginning a bit easier. I also have a good deal of experience in translating difficult municipal finance into a more approachable set up. I hope to bring a level headed and a measured view to topics of concern. I try to be an educated individual on as many topics as possible but am always happy to listen to other points of view and do additional research to aid in my ability to make the best decision possible for our schools.

|  |
| --- |
| Never submit passwords through Google Forms. |