



MEET THE CANDIDATES

WILLIAM (BILL) WAALKES

2022 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE PROFILE

JENISON RESIDENT FOR 66 YEARS

WHY ARE YOU RUNNING FOR THE BOARD OF EDUCATION?

I have been a part of the Jenison Public School Board for over 23 years now. I have seen many success stories and have made it through many struggles. Throughout it all, the Board of Education has always tried to do what is best for the students. I have loved being a part of this, and I would like to contribute for another 6 years. We have to always try to keep improving in everything we do, and I feel my experience and dedication are assets to the school district.

IF ELECTED, WHAT WILL BE YOUR PRIORITIES?

We need to continue to work to catch kids up to where they should be at this time in their learning experience. Many kids feel behind because of the Covid interruptions. The best place to learn is with the teachers, in their classrooms with their teachers. We have made some strides over the last 2 summers, but more needs to be done.

Another very important issue to me is the security of everyone in our buildings. We can not change some issues that are going on in our country but we can do something about making our buildings as safe as possible. We have set up a very good plan, but we need to keep modifying and improving that.

Also, we need to keep finding the best teachers and administrators. Once we get them we need to keep training them in the Wildcat Way. We must work collaboratively to provide the best working conditions with competitive pay and benefits. We have to keep them in the JPS system.

HOW ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN THE JENISON SCHOOL COMMUNITY?

I started by volunteering at Bauerwood Elementary to be on a Parent/Teacher school improvement team. I then was on the Jenison Public Education Foundation for 2 years. In 1998 I started volunteering with the Jenison Marching Band with their Equipment Crew and have since 2000 been the leader of this group. I was also on the Booster Board for a few years, including one year as its President. I was elected to the Jenison School Board in 1999 and was the President from 2008 to 2020. Over the years, I have been in the classrooms on many occasions, from helping several times with the ACT class, volunteering to be interviewed in the Jr High, and teaching Jr Achievement for 3 years to some 4th graders. People know that I am available to help out whenever asked.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE PRIMARY WORK/FUNCTION OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION?

The true function of the School Board is to make policies and hire a Superintendent. We trust the Superintendent and his team to then handle the operations of the District. We keep informed and give approval to what is being recommended. We are not there to micromanage, but more to oversee what is happening.

WHAT ATTRIBUTES & BEHAVIORS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS?

The most important attribute we can have is to listen, observe and ask questions. We need to be team players. We are not there to question everything or to wander around the schools asking questions. The staff are trained to educate, we are not.

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WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR EDUCATION IN OUR COMMUNITY?

My vision for education at Jenison Public Schools is that we try to push all students to as high of a level as they are willing to go. It has to be a collaborative effort between the students, the parents, and JPS. Not all students need or want to go to college. We need to prepare kids for college if they want, but we can also direct them toward the skilled trades, military, or maybe going into business themselves. Students are not all the same; we need to do our best for every one.

WHAT PARTICULAR EXPERIENCES OR SKILLS HAVE PREPARED YOU TO SERVE AS A BOARD MEMBER?

I feel I have a few skills that have helped me in my 23 years on the Board and will continue to help me in the future. I am a good listener, and I am not afraid to ask questions to get clarification or a better understanding. I have spent my work career working with many levels of people both in the Steelcase Payroll Department and at Hayden's Tax Service. I feel comfortable talking to everyone. My financial background has served me well as a Board member as I understand a budget and am comfortable talking about it. I believe in leading by example. I am willing to volunteer and work hard whenever I see the opportunity.

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES YOU FROM OTHER CANDIDATES AND/OR BOARD MEMBERS?

The biggest difference between the other 4 candidates and me is my 23+ years of experience as a Jenison School Board member. I know what has to be done, and I know who to ask questions of when needed. Many staff and parents have told me they trust me to do the right thing for all the students at JPS. I have proven myself over the years as a hard worker capable of talking about issues with all involved in the education process. I understand the complete educational process, and I know where I fit into the system. I also know that I should not try to interfere in that process, I am not trained to be a professional teacher, but I am a very good observer.

WHAT FOCUS AREA OF OUR STRATEGIC VISION EXCITES YOU MOST?

One very important area is our District Climate. About 25% of our students choose to come to JPS from surrounding districts. I believe a good reason for this is how we treat students, staff, and parents. The values of the Wildcat Way are our way of trying to make everyone feel loved, wanted, safe, and appreciated at JPS. It is our way of giving everyone an equal opportunity. We have to continue to try not to discriminate for any reason. One other area that I love to see the Board work on is working with all groups to develop further the Strategic Vision that will help JPS continue to improve. We have been very successful, but we can not rest on that. We need to continue to push ourselves to more success.

WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE CURRENT WORKING AND LEARNING CLIMATE IN OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT?

I believe we have a great educational system at JPS. That is why we lead the area in school of choice students coming to us. However, we need to realize not everyone thinks this. We need to find out what some feel we should do better and, if possible, make that happen. Since I have been on the Board, we have always celebrated success, but we also have always asked how we can continue to improve.

I FEEL MOST PASSIONATELY ABOUT:

I have been a Jenison resident since my parents moved here when I was 3 years old. I have never left. I attended JPS K-12, as have my 3 children. I feel Jenison is a great community, and I feel that is mostly because of the school system. Jenison is a community that supports and appreciates the school system. Most people realize that a strong education system makes for a strong community, whether you have kids still in school or not, which is why I have stayed on the Board of Education for so long. I know the school is very important to the quality of life here and the values of our property. I love JPS and the community and would love to continue to serve for 6 more years.

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