

Zuki Ellis, Abdi Omer, and Gita Rijal Zeitler failed to answer our questionnaire. To inform voters as best we can, MNYC brought in relevant information from candidates' websites when possible.

1. What do you see as the role of students and community voices in decisions that affect the St. Paul Public Schools?

- **Chauntyll Allen:** Everything I do is about centering and serving the needs of youth and families. I will continue to connect with students and families, create space for their voices to be heard, and advocate for their needs in rooms where they are not at the table. I believe in co-governance with community. The district needs to do a better job of listening, and I will continue to push for the administration to connect meaningfully through culturally-responsive engagement and following through with community-recommended processes and programs. Throughout my first term, I have suggested, questioned, and directed the administration to engage with community and I will continue to do so. I will also continue to have transparent communication and push the district to build stronger relationships.
- **Yusef Carrillo:** Student and Community voices are key in being able to diagnose and understand what is really happening in our schools. Their voices need to be active and participant in our engagement and decision making.
- **Zuki Ellis (from website):** We are working with students to design what their role in the board should look like - the previous system wasn't working. What's the best way to gather input and incorporate into how we plan for the future of the district? I'm excited to develop that in collaboration.
- **Carlo Franco:** Students and Community Voices are critical and should always influence the way that board members vote on policy, budget and leadership issues. As a board member, I will continue to be present in the community and at schools to ensure that issues and the challenges and bright spots that are happening in our schools make the public meeting agenda and we can action-plan around solutions in partnership with those impacted - our students, families and educators.
- **Abdi S Omer:** has no website to view stances or policies.
- **Erica Valliant:** Students and Community Voices are vital stakeholder voices to be included if we are to make well informed decisions, as those decisions will impact students and community.
- **Gita Rijal Zeitler:** does not have this answer on website.

2. How do you think the district should ensure every student belongs?

- **CA:** Each student must feel a sense of belonging. I believe in a holistic approach to safety and mental health that starts with creating trauma-informed spaces supported by trained, caring professionals and community members. I will continue to advance programs and policies that ensure culturally appropriate and trauma-informed mental health approaches that affirm and heal rather than stigmatize and punish students. As a Black woman with an adult life based on supporting youth, I will continue to bring all of my connections, relationship-building skills, willingness to speak truth to power, and love for all kids to achieve these goals.
- **YC:** Every student belongs when we build a culture that fosters the type of transparency and introspection that allows for the whole organization to embody this mantra. We cannot fulfill this promise if our attitude is to disbelieve our students, our families and our community.
- **ZE (from website):** Special Education: This is personal for me. I've been frustrated by the inconsistency of our support for our large population of special needs students. I will continue to use my personal experiences in the district to advocate for improved and more targeted support for students and families. For example, the differences between IEP implementation between buildings can be jarring, and make it hard for kids who transfer to adapt. I will continue to focus a bright light on solving these shortcomings.
- **CF:** It is important that we spend time building relationships at the beginning of every class period and even more intensively in the beginning of school years or changes in classes. The system puts a lot of pressures on our educators and students to begin learning the curriculum on day one. If we take time to get to know each other, and build solid relationships with adults in the space - more youth will feel as if they belong and have someone they can talk to. A robust investment in student leadership programming, out of school time and extracurricular programming, athletics, employment and arts programming will also contribute to a culture where everyone is involved.
- **AO:** has no website to view stances or policies.
- **EV:** I think some ways to ensure every student belongs is to work with parents and community to understand what students need and resource those things. Representation matters so working to increase the number of teachers of color, supporting ethnic studies, and providing access to diverse media mix.
- **GRZ (from website):** Respect individual choices and needs (respect who they are)- of each kid in school and support them emotionally. Make school a safe/non-violent zone for each kid so they can come without the anxiety and stress of getting hurt.

- 3. Where does power lay in the working relationship between the superintendent and the school board? How do you see your role in supporting or changing this dynamic?**
- **CA:** The role of a School Board member is to hire and manage the performance of the district superintendent and ensure that the district budget is fiscally responsible and balanced. Our role is also to ensure that the voice of the community – students, parents, caregivers, educators, and taxpayers – is represented in all decisions regarding how tax dollars are spent.
 - **YC:** MN statutes are clear that the sole responsibility for administering and running the district lies within it's elected board officials. We may delegate tasks associated with the administration of our schools to our Superintendent, but we must hold our administration accountable, and ourselves accountable to this reality. We must change by training ourselves to become experts and trustworthy servant leaders to our schools, leading our administration by example on what we want SPPS to embody.
 - **ZE (from website):** I am committed to: Good governance: our board has to be able to function collectively, be well-informed, and ready to make the tough decisions that deliver the world class education our students deserve.
 - **CF:** The primary function of the school board is hiring, employing and managing a Superintendent in addition to being responsible for the public dollars allocated to fund our public school district. The Board must take a more active role in setting the priorities for budgeting and ensuring that the dollars allocated in the district prioritize direct services in classrooms and the school level. I believe in servant and transformational leadership. This means that while we may not see immediate results we are working to transform systems to better serve our most impacted people while also doing it in a way that centers the workers and patrons. I am looking forward to taking this leadership style into district governance and having a relationship with clear expectations of work, regular check-ins, results driven and respond adaptively to challenges.
 - **AO:** has no website to view stances or policies.
 - **EV:** The School Board supervises the superintendent. My role is to support this dynamic in a healthy and collaborative manner.
 - **GRZ:** does not have this answer on website.

4. How would you measure and hold the district accountable in its implementation of strategic plans & initiatives?

- **CA:** I commit to setting clear goals, pushing our superintendent to implement effective and equitable strategies, and holding administration accountable to our goals through superintendent evaluation. I am never afraid to raise my voice to hold people and systems accountable to open communication and I will continue to do so.
- **YC:** Effective accountability starts with training ourselves and our administration with the key components of a trustworthy organization:
 - i. We are truth tellers, and we do it with compassion for one another
 - ii. We become aware of the needs of all stakeholders, governing from the ground up, not from the top to the bottom.
 - iii. We prioritize culture change, servant leadership and we change the administration’s performance review rubric to reflect these values.
- **ZE (from website):** In order to get the district our students need, we have to constantly evaluate the work we’ve been doing, what lies ahead of us, and not be afraid to face our mistakes. We have to be constantly questioning.
 - i. What will move student achievement? We can’t do that without talking about racial disparities, and the work we’re doing as a district to address and improve outcomes.
 - ii. What does it mean for to have a SPPS education? We prioritize positive change through accountability, the strategic plan, and evaluation of the superintendent.
 - iii. What is true community engagement? The district should collaborate with families — engagement isn’t checking a box, it’s a journey together, based on trust. The district needs to be at community events and informational meetings, having a real dialogue.
 - iv. What does it to make our system more transparent and accessible? We need to change how difficult it is to navigate special education — families don’t even know what they can be asking for.
- **CF:** These are initiatives that must be presented during board meetings in ways that make sense to everyone in the community. I will ask questions about the direct implementation of specific strategic initiatives and ensure that the goals we set are making progress. If not, I will be sure to request revisions in processes and/or a change in how we are operating to ensure that we are attempting implementation plans that are effective. I believe strongly in a quality improvement cycle and I’m constantly assessing, asking questions and action planning to ensure that we produce results that are best for our young people.
- **AO:** has no website to view stances or policies.

- EV: As a board member I'd like ensure there is a system to help hold the Superintendent and the district accountable by setting a plan in place that we can use to identify and track progress, identify areas of success, challenges, opportunities and threats or disruption. This is something that we can continually update and evaluate on a quarterly basis.
- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

5. In your eyes, what does successful collaboration for a school board member look like?

- CA: Partnership is about open and frequent communication, and holding ourselves and each other accountable to student success. My approach is all about communication and connection, taking the time to talk with stakeholders to understand everyone's perspectives and needs. My approach to disagreements, when they happen, is to relentlessly pursue mutual understanding – to stay in conversation until we get to a place where we understand each other and can find a mutually-agreeable solution. I believe that we all want the same outcome: a vital, equitable school district where students and staff thrive.
- YC: It is holding space with many key participants in our schools, it is also firm in it's intent. Our district is not for sale and not available to the whims of extremism. It seeks to listen to the needs and real issues facing our schools and builds a real cadence of relational events (meetings, commissions, trainings) that build trust and engagement.
- ZE (from website): Student Voice In Decision Making: we are working with students to design what their role in the board should look like - the previous system wasn't working. What's the best way to gather input and incorporate into how we plan for the future of the district? I'm excited to develop that in collaboration.
- CF: Successful collaboration can look like many things. I think it must start with developing a board culture that folks will commit to, in order to best center our young people and district operations to move together collectively. A successful collaboration for community and youth looks like being accessible and building authentic relationships where we can consult each other on issues pressing the district.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.
- EV: Healthy board governance looks like effective execution of policy, decision making involves making choices about and based on the organization's vision, mission, and strategies. The board should work towards consensus in decision making and should have effective methods of oversight being mindful not to step into the management space. There should be respect for and community

agreements or agreements that the board agrees to hold space by and hold themselves and each other accountable to.

- GRZ (from website): Below are the some of ideas I have based on my experience helping in a charter school, talking with neighbors about their experience with private schools and in observing my kids' current public school:
 - i. Using untapped resources: Parents and retired community members can be reached out to volunteer in the schools. We need to learn from charter and private schools in how they involve of parents to make their schools successful.
 - ii. Partnership with local businesses, non-profit organizations, farmers, theaters to provide opportunities to learn in real time, and connect with our earth and environment and culture.

6. As a school board member, from whom will you seek advice or input in weighing key decisions?

- CA: I believe in co-governance with community which includes students, parents and caregivers, taxpayers, teachers, educators, and other residents and employees of the district.
- YC: I will seek advice from multiple sources. Past board members, current board members, our elected officials in City, County and State bodies. And in the people truly doing the education: Our educators, students and parents.
- ZE: does not have this answer on website.
- CF: I will always seek input and advice from the people most impacted. In many cases that is our students, educators and community members. I will do this by reaching out to our people to educate them on the key issues that are taking place at the board meeting, and actually ask them for their feedback to help inform my decision.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.
- EV: Fellow Board members, Staff, students, and other community and district stakeholders who may be affected by decisions.
- GRZ:

7. What are your budget priorities, and how will you protect them while ensuring the district is financially sustainable?

- CA: My priorities are to:
 - i. Boost literacy for K-3 scholars
 - ii. Fund technical education and trades, including targeted programming for youth exiting punishment programs
 - iii. Implement universal pre-K

iv. Increase educator pay and advancement and recruit and retain more educators of color.

v. Cultivate safety and mental health for all scholars

I have supported the campaign to fully fund schools every year at the Capitol. I'm willing to call, email, and meet with anyone on the education committee to ensure proper funding is allocated to support student needs and ensure the success of our young people. I believe in creating a strong, publicly-funded school system and will continue to advocate for schools and curriculum that meet the needs of our students and community, free of corporate influence.

- **YC:** I am going to prioritize making sure that our schools are safe, by investing in and boosting our Restorative practices, increasing the number of SSLs present at sites, providing them with top notch training to make sure they are serving at their best capacity. I will also focus on making sure we offer diverse educational paths for students so we can retain students and families looking for unique programs unavailable in other districts.
- **ZE (from website):** this last legislative session saw a huge increase in spending on education at the state level, which is wonderful, and I'm very excited to see the impact of those dollars in our our district. But a significant portion of that funding was one time dollars. The district also received a funding boost from the American Rescue Plan, but we will shortly lose access to those funds which offset some of the increase at the state level. Indexing the formula to inflation and the per student increases are great, but it doesn't change the fact that we've been held back by underfunding for decades. I have led the fight at the state capitol to secure better funding, and will continue to demand the level of financial support our schools need so all our students can succeed.
- **CF:** I would like to see a significant investment in restorative practices and justice. This can be delivered through intensive professional development from members we have connected to our communities already. This can be a low-cost opportunity, as long as district leadership, site leadership, students, families and educators all have access and are committed to creating a restorative culture where we center learning and being in community. Additionally, I would like to study the budget and ensure that additional resources can be allocated to the schools to have some flexibility in the positions that they have in their space that adapt to each individual school community, as we know each one is different. I would also like to see our TA's, nutrition services staff and our other lowest paid workers receive sizable increases that actually are competitive and thriving wages. We should prioritize our lowest wage workers when discussing budget priorities all of the time. These things can be balanced, and we have to ensure that the spending does not surpass our revenue.
- **AO:** has no website to view stances or policies.

- EV: My budget priorities are restorative practices, early learning, teacher recruitment and retention, financial literacy, healthy teacher; student ratios in classrooms. As with any budget and as immediate priorities may change, I collaborate to make/request adjustments as necessary.
- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

8. If elected, what strategies will you advocate for to hire, retain, and support educators of color?

- CA: I believe in our Grow Your Own pathway to create our own educators from our community. As a former educator and youth worker, I have helped create a pipeline of educators and coaches by encouraging youth to pursue educational careers. In my first term, I :
 - i. worked with community to advocate for an increase in paraprofessional pay to bridge the gap and help more educators of color to get into the SPPS pipeline.
 - ii. advocated for the St. Thomas Urban Teaching residency program. There was a \$10,000 increase to the annual stipend along with funds for crisis support along the way
 - iii. worked with several local churches to begin the Ignite your Heart scholarship specifically for black teachers who experience additional hardship in obtaining a license in the program.
 - iv. supported the elimination of the Tiered licensure program through the state. As a result, SPPS has begun a new initiative to recruit teachers from historically Black colleges and universities.
- YC: Number one strategy will be to focus on building and strengthening effective leadership teams at schools that include student voices as well. Using the leverage of these leadership teams I plan to focus on training our staff to focus on building a culture that fosters educators of color to feel safe and welcome in our schools.
- ZE: does not have this answer on website.
- CF: I believe an Educator Pathways Program should be widely available and implemented within the OCCR Pathways Programs. If we can make learning fun and exciting, and show young people the pathways to becoming an educator, we could start growing our own teachers from our district starting in High School. Additionally, seeking additional revenue sources and programs to ensure that our non-licensed educators who want to become licensed teachers, can. SUTR is great, but is only designed for educators who already have a bachelor's degree. Free college at state universities beginning in Fall 2024, could potentially be a catalyst for this initiative.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.

- EV: Continue to support Ethnic Studies, advocate for the inclusion of African American, African, and Indigenous histories, contributions, and view points to be incorporated into the curriculum. Advocate for avenues to increase the number of teachers of color through policy and programming. Invest in training for educators, building staff, and district staff around ACES, historical trauma, implicit biases, institutional racism and how it works and shows up in society, in community, in the classroom. Support and invest in restorative Justice practices for use with students and with staff, district staff as a means of working in a healthier manner with each other.
- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

9. What is your definition of ‘school safety’?

- CA: School safety is a community learning environment in which students and staff feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe, and where all people feel included, seen, and valued. Restorative Justice has been proven to create positive student and school outcomes in other districts and I support its full implementation in SPPS from Pre-K to High School.
- YC: School safety is a state in which a school is able to provide an educational experience to students that is not hampered by fear. School safety is for Students, Educators, Staff and Families. A safe school is not just free from violence, but free from retaliation, free from bullying at all relational levels, free from hate, and free from socioeconomic harassment. Students may have issues and problems in a safe school, but they will find a community that welcomes them and hears them out.
- ZE (from website): We all want to know our children are safe in their schools. If they don't feel safe they can't learn. However, this is a complex topic that has to be approached in a holistic way - there is no magic, simple solution. I do not believe, nor does research prove, that armed police in our schools make them safer. Instead we have to heal our communities by bringing leaders into our sites to build relationships with our kids to prevent their isolation. Any solutions will have to first honestly acknowledge the harm that has caused our students to struggle and our collective responsibility to repair and rebuild their sense of self-worth.
- CF: School safety makes everyone feel as though they belong, have built relationships with others, feel like they can report challenges to at least one adult and feel comfortable enough in the space to ensure that they can foster a thriving learning environment.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.
- EV: School safety means that everyone in and around the building feels safe, from physical violence, emotional violence, racial violence, or any other form of

violence. It also means that everyone has a sense of belonging or feeling safe as a person in the space that they are in, and in the skin that they are in. This also means that people feel safe from repercussions when they report something, question policies or practices, or advocate for families or for themselves. There is no way to ensure absolute safety however, we can work towards getting as close to it as possible.

- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

10. Do you support school resource officers (SROs) returning to St. Paul Public Schools? Why?

- CA: No.
- YC: I have to say I do not. The recent pullback by Sheriff Offices across the state, due to a very reasonable legislative clarification of the role of SRO's in physically restraining students clarified to me that the peace officer, hired and trained by a Law Enforcement agency is not aligned with the goals that we want to set in this district. I don't criticize parents who advocate for their presence, I understand their stated need for safety. I believe SRO's are the answer for a minority of our district, not the majority. My goal will be to create a safe district and safe schools and the work already initiated with the SSL program has shown potential that needs to be expanded.
- ZE: does not have this answer on website.
- CF: I do not believe returning SRO's into our schools is the answer to more safe school communities. I believe that a full investment in restorative practices, and proactive interventions should be fully invested in and implemented with fidelity. This also means hiring people in our school buildings that also know our youth in the community to be a bridge to incidents that may arise in the community and can be mediated / repaired prior to youth that are in conflict re-entering the same classrooms or hallway spaces.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.
- EV: No. Schools cannot be a place where kids are scared nor a place where they are policed. I do not support efforts that would only further facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline and the over-policing of black and brown students. We also know that these efforts have been tried, and they did not and will not work. What has been proven to work are community-driven solutions such as restorative justice practices. I am committed to advocating for full funding of restorative justice practices programming and needed supports for all of our schools. Additionally, we must invest in the critical student and educator supports so that we can provide a quality education in a safe working and learning environment. We cannot forget that our students' learning environments are our educators' working environments. We must also ensure adequate staffing levels so that the professionals serving our kids can do safely and can focus on instruction and connecting with young people. I will also

personally be in our schools to help foster a culture of school pride, respect, & belonging with staff, students, and families as a school board member and require that district staff do the same on a regular quarterly basis.

- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

11. What is your understanding of social-emotional learning? How do you think it is being taught in schools?

- CA: I believe social-emotional learning is about giving students the tools to cope and process life's hardships. I think it's currently being taught in schools through a very white lens, and the resources and methods need to be diversified so all students have access to culturally-relevant tools that support the types of emotional struggles they deal with or may encounter.
- YC: I believe that social emotional learning (SEL) is needed in our schools. But I believe that the debate around their implementation needs to be framed under a very clear understanding that SEL is not an end to itself. We need our students to develop and thrive in a world that has taken little care of their needs. If we want our future leaders to emphasize being caring, trustworthy and to focus on building community, Social emotional learning skills are absolutely needed in our classrooms.
- ZE: does not have this answer on website.
- CF: Social emotional learning is the ability to talk about and name feelings. In learning spaces, it is important that other youth and adults know how everyone is showing up so that way we can provide grace and space to talk about their needs. A simple check in question prior to class starting could potentially be a way to begin implementing SEL in school. Additionally, ensuring our educators have a baseline training in best practices for SEL there is consistent implementation and conversation about normalizing talking about emotions.
- AO: has no website to view stances or policies.
- EV: Social-emotional learning is the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success. In my experience it's being taught/used with our younger students and through trauma informed and restorative practices.
- GRZ: does not have this answer on website.

12. Young people need ferocious, risk-taking champions to build the futures they deserve. Tell us about a time in your public leadership when you took a risk. What was the risk? How did it go?

- **CA:** After George Floyd was murdered, most elected officials spent numerous hours on Zoom calls trying to manage the voices and outrage of the youth. Many were concerned about the frontline position I took supplying young people with goggles, life jackets, helmets, facemasks, and teargas neutralizer to protect them from the terror projected by the Minneapolis Police department. That terror is best described in the report from the Department of Justice, released in 2023. The risk I took in doing that was not only to my physical safety, but also to my political credibility. But that risk paid off in two ways: first and most importantly, youth on the front lines were safer and more protected. Additionally, the actions of frontline organizers and activists led to justice for George Floyd along with a consent decree on the Minneapolis Police department.
- **YC:** Being part of the school board in 2021 was very difficult because we were presented by the administration with a slate of schools that they wanted to re-engineer or close. Throughout the process I was aware of the budgetary reality that keeping schools open that had been under-enrolled for years was a long term risk. The process the administration used was destructive and made many in the board feel rather uneasy. In the end I voted to close a slate of schools and not others. I have very strong reasons why, but ultimately the end result was mixed. I carry that decision with me as a learning moment, because not everything that the administration brings up is the best for the district and we need to build an organization that actually is engaging fearlessly and truthfully with our communities before undertaking decisions like these. Many people have reached out to me with different takes on this decision, and I respect all of the opinions. I truly think that some aspects of the decision were needed, but overall, the process was rushed, and fraught with obfuscation. We need our district to truly reflect the values that we want our students to carry into their lives, and live out those values with care and compassion for all.
- **ZE:** does not have this answer on website.
- **CF:** I'm constantly taking risks for what is right. In my work as president of west side boosters we had to continually advocate and push back to the city and school district to ensure our youth have access to quality infrastructure for athletics and out of school time programming - this allows over 800 youth to participate annually and we have strengthened relationships with the public partners for it. There's always a risk when pushing back on the institutions and people with institutional power - but when you're fighting for what's right and the community has your back, the risk is always worth it! Additionally, being an active union member, spending time on picket lines and calling out

businesses/bosses/elected officials can also come with risk. I am proud to also have participated in many labor actions that center workers rights, and student learning conditions for the good of the public.

- **AO:** has no website to view stances or policies.
- **EV:** While I am fairly new to public leadership, I really think I took a risk when I shared my story of experiencing homelessness to help give law-maker the realization that behind these bills and policies are actual people who are actually navigating houselessness with children in school. It was impactful.
- **GRZ:** does not have this answer on website.