

Why are you running for school board?

I am running for school board because our students and staff need service-minded board members who base decisions on what best supports student growth and achievement. As a mother of three children currently in the schools, I have an immense amount of gratitude for the devoted staff of AGPS. Our family has experienced the extra care and attention they provide our students, above and beyond their job description. My hope is that my decisions as a board member directly support, champion, and equip them to do their job to the best of their ability.

Being an effective school board member is a commitment that requires significant time and personal improvement. Over the past 4 years, I have spent an extensive amount of time being mentored, attending conferences, volunteering, advocating, campaigning, networking, studying, and serving on ancillary boards and committees. My hope is that I can continue to build upon the knowledge and experiences from my first term to continue to improve student learning at AGPS.

I love Ashland, and am deeply grateful to have called this area home for the past six years. Families like mine are choosing to move here for our exceptionally rated schools, and lower levy in comparison with surrounding districts. The schools are the heartbeat of this community, and our constituents clearly recognize this correlation. Ashland-Greenwood is the only district in the state to successfully surpass the 60% voter threshold for a special election to increase spending authority. I do not take this trust lightly. A clear understanding of the situation the district is in, how we got here, and how we navigate future funding is essential to steward that investment moving forward. I would be grateful for the opportunity to continue honoring our community's commitment to our schools through thoughtful, responsible leadership in the coming years.

Property taxes are a challenge, especially with increasing property valuations in the district creating higher tax bills for local taxpayers. How will you support providing excellent educational and extracurricular opportunities for Ashland-Greenwood students while also being conscientious of the contribution of district tax payers?

Our district has a demonstrated history of taxpayer consciousness. Just prior to my time on the board, the members at the time acted proactively to lower the levy in response to rising valuations in our area. During my term, the levy has decreased from .95 in 2022-2023 to .82 approved this August. It is also important to emphasize that property valuations are determined by the county, not the school district. Fortunately, as our local population grows and state-imposed caps remain in effect, rising valuations will naturally drive the levy downward.

During my tenure, the district has cut just under \$500,000 in nonpayroll expenditures. Even so, persistent increases in operational costs will require a continuous focus on responsible financial stewardship and consideration of additional cuts. Achieving more impactful savings will require us to look closely at non-mandated programs and services—offerings that our constituents are accustomed to, cherish, and which enrich our community life. As we have these difficult

conversations, my utmost priority would be the protection of staffing and academics. Across the state and nationwide, school districts are increasingly exploring private funding and public-private partnerships. Exploring how various entities like our education foundation might help bridge funding gaps for these programs is a possibility as we look to the future.

With growing enrollment, appropriate staffing levels are a concern. How will you ensure effective staffing levels are in place to address the varying needs of all students?

I have had the opportunity to observe classrooms throughout multiple buildings to hear how this is affecting teachers practically speaking. In the high school we have multiple science sections with over 25 students. I have talked to a special education teacher who is spending an additional hour and half working in the evenings on individualized student plans. I have observed the shortage in elementary intervention, where group sizes are increasing and building principles are stepping in to provide required services. Our lower level classes are growing, with our largest classroom size now at 25. The strain on teachers is further compounded by a shortage of paraprofessionals for classroom support. Our staff is resilient and willing to stretch themselves to meet the needs of our students. However, if we want to retain our educators while maintaining a high standard of learning, we must address these staffing shortfalls.

As enrollment has steadily grown, hiring has stagnated. Between the years of 2015-2025 our enrollment has grown by over 300 students. During my time on the board, we have not added a single *additional* teaching position. This has been one of the unfortunate consequences of the loss of 1.2M in state aid, and the caps coming into place at a time when the board had lowered the levy.

Thankfully our community understood the position our schools are in and passed the special election this past November. These tax receipts will begin to come in later this winter, bringing much-needed relief. Our community echoed its desire for increased staffing through their responses to our recent Strategic Plan surveys. A repeated theme was the importance of small class sizes, increased opportunities for our high ability learners, and increased class offerings. Unfortunately, being in a position to hire teachers will take time. It will require diligent reserve-building, and no further cuts or interference from the state. It will also require board members who are willing to put the needs of students first, and optimize the allowable growth allotted by the state for next year's budget.

What are other key issues facing the Ashland-Greenwood school district and how do you feel the school board should address them?

Entering yet another school year with no cash reserves, at the will of two current board members, is irresponsible and places our district in a position of financial risk. As a growing school district operating with no margin, we are unable to absorb potential facility emergencies, incapable of hiring new teachers, ill-prepared for increases in areas like medical insurance and benefits, and deeply vulnerable to any further state funding cuts. No buffer exists for new students moving into our district after the October cut-off, further draining our resources. Furthermore, continuing to neglect hiring and capital outlay as a result of no reserve, only

compounds eventual future expenses. The lack of cash reserves has caused repeated cash flow disparities. During lean months where tax receipts tend to be lower, or when federal or state reimbursements are lagging, we have to depend upon inter-fund loans to meet payroll and monthly operating expenses. We cannot continue to operate in this manner. Building a cash reserve needs to be an urgent priority. School board members need to fulfill their fiduciary obligation to act and vote in the best financial and operational interest of the school district.

My first term on the school board, which began in January 2023, has been defined by constant change and fiscal uncertainty. Just months into my term, our district was notified of an unexpected loss of \$1.2 million in state aid. Shortly thereafter, the state implemented massive property tax reforms. Between new caps on our general fund and the loss of funding, our school district has had to grapple with dramatic fluctuations in revenue. Looking ahead, the reality is that the state is facing a nearly billion-dollar deficit, meaning further funding cuts and tighter constraints on school districts are likely ahead. This climate requires board members who understand these challenges from day one. I have demonstrated an active role alongside fellow members on the policy and legislative committee—engaging directly with our state senators, even meeting face-to-face with the governor to share our story and advocate for the needs of Ashland-Greenwood Public Schools. We need board members who not only understand these complex issues but will proactively stand up and fight for our district's future.

Offering full family health insurance as part of our total compensation package has historically been an effective recruiting tool for many school districts across the state. However, soaring healthcare costs are creating new challenges for schools to navigate. Across the country, large medical insurance pools and employer plans are experiencing a sustained period of higher-than-average rate adjustments, reflecting the trends we have observed over recent renewal cycles. Now, with national medical cost trends increasing between 8-9%, historic increases in medical insurance are being reported for school districts nationwide. These costs severely constrain school budgets. Managing these mounting costs will require thoughtful evaluation of future plan designs, ensuring we can responsibly manage district resources while keeping our compensation offerings competitive.

Serving on the board of education these past few years has been challenging, but it has also been a great honor. Thank you for the opportunity to represent our community in this capacity—and for your continued partnership in keeping our schools strong.