

Candidates emphasize unique characteristics

<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/palatine/news/287813.pa-D15forum-030807-s1.article>

March 8, 2007

By [MARIO BARTOLETTI](#) Staff Writer

Elementary School District 15 residents got the chance to question candidates running for School Board last week.

There are no incumbents among the six candidates running for the three seats on the board. Five of the six candidates for the four-year terms showed up in the Sundling Junior High School gymnasium with former High School District 211 Superintendent Gerald Chapman absent due to a prior engagement. The election will be held April 17.

The March 1 forum was jointly sponsored by the Northwest Suburban Council of PTA and the League of Women Voters.

Common ground

After brief introductory opening statements, candidates answered questions from the audience. On many of the issues, candidates were parallel if not in full agreement with each other.

Candidates agreed that students should be lifelong learners and global competitors; supported bilingual education; wanted to hire a superintendent with financial expertise, experience and good communication skills; opposed redistricting; and stated that they would seek a referendum only as a last resort.

Personal qualities

Candidates defined qualities they possessed that would make them work well with other board members.

Lisa Neal, a PTA School Board liaison, works in the business office of a medical facility.

"As a parent and a mother, I've been to the school of consensus building and listening," Neal said. "I have analytical skills from my research background."

Dr. James Ekeberg is a family physician and District 15 volunteer.

"When you counsel individuals, it helps to look at all sides, and that's the thing needed in this district," Ekeberg said. "You need to take into account the needs of all parties to get them to go in the same direction."

Sue Quinn, a school volunteer, has worked as an environmental and aerospace engineer.

"I've worked with a wide range of people from technicians to union personnel," Quinn said. "In the district, I've worked with teachers, parents and administrators."

Mary Vanek is an attorney and PTA member.

"I have had the opportunity to negotiate settlements between parties that came to the table miles apart," she said. "My (legal background) helps me listen, analyze facts, take in both sides of the story and come to a logical conclusion."

Rich Bokor is a National-Louis University instructor and former District 15 and District 211 teacher and coach.

"I'm a father of three and grandfather of four. I learned listening skills (from) my wife," Bokor said. "I've coached for 30 years, and we have always emphasized being a team player."

Custodial outsourcing

Candidates were adamantly opposed to the idea of outsourcing custodial staff except for Vanek who agreed with the safety issues raised by other candidates but said it was worth looking into.

Role of board

In terms of the appropriate role of a School Board member, candidates had several varied positions. All candidates agreed for the most part that a board member's job is to set policy and represent the community, but Quinn expressed a more multifaceted role.

"The role of board members is manifold. They provide oversight to the school system ... provide direction to the administration on specific matters and to the community as a whole where we want to be educationally," Quinn said, "and direction as role models to our children."

Ekeberg paraphrased from the Illinois School Board Association Code:

"The board member functions only at the board meeting," he said. "When he leaves the board meeting, he is a community member just like anyone else."

Exiting employees

Candidates also addressed the loss of staff in the district with Bokor and Ekeberg citing a lack of trust, Quinn saying deficit spending forced layoffs, and Neal saying she had not noticed a particularly extreme exodus.

"I've heard people leave for better opportunities," Vanek said. "If it's purely an issue of money, there's nothing we can do about that. If it's about morale, we can address that."

Candidates Chapman, Bokor and Ekeberg are running together and have been endorsed by the Northwest Coalition for Quality Education. During the forum, Bokor and Ekeberg said they would seek support from community groups, including teachers unions.

The other candidates said they would not accept support from unions.