

CFF Ferndale School Board Candidates Forum
Sunday, October 30
1:00 – 2:30 pm
at Ferndale City Hall
Election Day: Tuesday, November 8, 2016

Name ___Mike Davisson_____

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How long have you lived in the Ferndale School district?
_____Eight years_____

If you are a parent, do (did) your children attend Ferndale schools? Why or why not?_

My three children currently attend Ferndale Lower Elementary School, a 2nd grader and twin 1st graders. It was not long ago that we chose the school district for our children. We believe that is important to send our children to the local schools within their community. Our children were students in Ferndale’s Little Eagles preschool program during each of its initial four years in existence. Through that experience we were able to recognize what a dynamic, diverse, and thoroughly educational environment exists within the Ferndale schools, so after that first year in Little Eagles, there was no question in our minds that they would be enrolled here.

Why are you running for the School Board?

I’m running for school board because I want to advance democratic, equitable education in Ferndale. I want to ensure that my children succeed, but more importantly, I want to be an agent in making sure all students in the district achieve, regardless of race, class, community-of-origin, or learning style or disability. I will be a liaison between the community and the district, listening to feedback from all stakeholders and incorporating it into thoughtful consideration and decision making for the benefit of all our students.

What specific experiences have you had that would prepare you for this position?

I have a bachelor's degree in English and Secondary Education and taught for a couple years early in my career. I taught in an alternative education setting for court adjudicated delinquent youth, ages 12-18. They were all in the same classroom, so I'm familiar with the challenge of differentiating curriculum and utilizing varied strategies to meet different learning styles and abilities. Now I'm a social worker, which provides me with skills and experience to approach difficult problems calmly with strong listening and problem-solving skills. Beyond my professional experience, I've been an active parent volunteer and was an active community participant in the strategic planning process. I've been an officer in Michigan Network for Equity in Education, a group of parents, school board members, academics, and other elected officials from across the state working to promote equitable, democratic education and oppose the educational privatization movement in the state. I have been a member of the school board's Achievement Committee this past year and worked on the campaign for the Sinking Fund millage that was generously passed by voters this past summer.

What do you see as the appropriate role of a School Board Trustee when they disagree with an action of the Superintendent?

One of the most important roles of a school board is to hire and oversee the superintendent to ensure that he is carrying out the goals of the district and adhering to the district's vision. If I disagree with the action of the superintendent, I will ask him further questions of clarity to discern his reasoning and intent. I will share my opinion and consult with the rest of the board regarding their opinions and their thoughts based on their experiences. We will decide as a board how to then proceed. I will be joining a school board comprised of experienced, thoughtful trustees from whom I will learn a great deal.

Are you familiar with the District's Strategic Plan? Where has FPS been most successful in achieving the goals of the plan?

The district has been most successful in its efforts toward equity and sustainability. Educational researcher and expert Pedro Noguera defines equity not as all students receiving the same education, but each student receiving what is needed for each individual to achieve. The restructuring of the elementary schools has enabled the district to more easily foster equitable education. One example is the restructuring of the elementary schools ensuring that all students who are in need of Title I services are able to receive them. Previously only two of the three elementary schools

qualified; now all qualify. The streamlining also enabled the building to reduce costs by closing and selling several buildings. This has a positive impact on the district's fund balance, which is rising and leading to greater financial stability and improved sustainability.

Where does the School District need to improve efforts to stay faithful to the Strategic Plan?

The district needs to continue its work toward closing the achievement gap between students of differing socioeconomic class. While we know that standardized tests scores have a close correlation with poverty, we also know that there are strategies districts can undertake to close the gap. The restructuring of the elementary schools desegregates our district, and researchers studying efforts to close the achievement gap point to integration as a chief strategy to improve academic outcomes for students of all races and socioeconomic class. The district is moving in the right direction but has room for growth.

How successful has the restructuring of the School District been to date? What actions need to be added to ensure ongoing success of the restructuring?

The majority of the feedback I have heard from parents about the restructuring has been positive, even from some who were opposed to the plan. The district needs to continue eliciting feedback from students, staff, parents, and the community to discern where the transition is not happening as smoothly as it could be so that adjustments can be made. The transition period will continue for some time, as students adjust to new schools and new classmates get to know one another. I believe the district needs to continue evaluating all of its programs to determine whether they are achieving their intended goals and how they can be improved when they are not achieving their goals.

Should the curriculum be the same for all students? Why or why not?

The district needs to have the same high standards for all students. The variation comes in the delivery of the education, the provision of instruction that takes into account various learning styles and offers the curriculum in a differentiated manner that puts each student in the best position to succeed.

How would you describe the role that diversity plays in shaping our district?

The district's diversity is one of its most amazing strengths. When our secondary students were interviewed during the strategic planning process, they overwhelmingly pointed to the district's racial diversity providing them a very rich experience. My daughter's kindergarten class had a wide array of skin tones and numerous religions represented, as well as students with disabilities and others with LGBT parents. Diversity plays a huge role in positively shaping our district, and I feel a deep gratitude for the experience of diversity our students have.

Please list three (3) assets of our school district. (Other than our wonderful students!)

- 1) Our enthusiastic parent involvement. Our parents extend the ability of the district to offer a myriad of activities and opportunities to its students. They are tireless in their efforts.
- 2) Our dedicated teachers. I'm continually amazed not only by the effort they put into the classroom education of their students, but also by their involvement in enrichment activities after-hours. I think to myself all the time – "Man, I would not want to be at my job right now!" when I repeatedly encounter them at evening events. Their commitment to our students is clear.
- 3) Diversity of opportunity. Our district continues to see expansion of opportunities for students. Our fine arts programs have been outstanding for a long time. Programs like the IMPI Robotics Team and the more recent Cambridge International Honors Program continue to extend the enrichment available in an array of areas.

Why should I send my child to Ferndale Schools?

I believe Ferndale schools offer a holistic educational experience. Our students flourish academically, socially, and emotionally, becoming prepared not only to be successful in whatever endeavors they undertake, but also to be good, thoughtful global citizens.