

The Des Moines Community Discussion Project

July 2017

Prepared by The Interactivity Foundation (IF)

Summary: The following report summarizes key discussion points collected through a series of online and in-person discussions with residents of Des Moines, Iowa. Each discussion was professionally facilitated, lasted approximately 75 minutes, and included a minimum of 4 discussion participants. The upcoming Des Moines school board election was the topic of discussion. Participants were encouraged to explore various dimensions of concern surrounding the school board election. Participants were also encouraged to reframe their concerns into questions that could be posed to school board candidates. Listed below is a consolidated list of possible topics/issues, concerns, and questions that citizens of Des Moines, Iowa expressed as important for the upcoming school board election. The order of items in the list is not intended to reflect participants' priorities, which were not assessed.

Topic/Issue/Concern	Questions Generated By Discussants
Diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Support/advanceo Infrastructureo Empathy/inclusiono Cost of programming	<p>Q: What are some of the challenges you associate with the growing diversity of our student population?</p> <p>Q: What are the benefits or strengths of an increasingly diverse student body?</p> <p>Q: How would you support the diverse needs of our students, faculty, staff, and community?</p> <p>Q: Do you believe it is important to intentionally recruit with the aim of diversifying our faculty, staff, administration? If so, what would be your policy to achieve this?</p>
Quality & Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Measuremento Teacher retentiono Curriculum compatibilityo Curriculum expansiono Lack of rigor	<p>Q: What issues get in the way of quality education? How would you address these obstacles?</p> <p>Q: How do you measure quality education? Which metrics and modes of evaluation would you use to measure quality of education?</p> <p>Q: How will you retain and support good teachers as they are being recruited to other states?</p> <p>Q: What constitutes good teaching? How will you measure this? How will you support advanced teaching approaches?</p>

<p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expansion ○ Compatibility ● 21st Century skills 	<p>Q: What type of skills should students be learning for success in the 21st century?</p> <p>Q: There is increased mobility within the district and between schools. What is your plan to make curriculum more compatible across schools?</p> <p>Q: How will you prioritize curriculum goals?</p> <p>Q: In what areas would you like to expand curriculum? For example, do you see a need for advanced technical training or apprenticeships? What sort of innovative programming would you advance if given the opportunity?</p>
<p>Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Philosophy of management ○ Style of leadership ○ Responsibilities 	<p>Q: How would you support and build leadership across the district and with particular emphasis on principals?</p> <p>Q: Who are your constituents?</p> <p>Q: What is the primary job of a school board member in your view?</p> <p>Q: How will you build relationships with members of the broader community? Which groups, organizations, stakeholders will you specifically target?</p> <p>Q: What might you do as a board member to create good governance within the school board?</p>
<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritization ○ Diversification ○ Local Control 	<p>Q: As funding appears to be a growing concern for the future, what strategies or plans would you advance to ensure our schools are properly funded?</p> <p>Q: As the budget tightens, which areas of education will you prioritize for funding and support?</p> <p>Q: Teachers have lost their bargaining rights. Will you support the teacher's union even as the budget tightens?</p> <p>Q: What might be some other sources of revenue? How are you going to find other sources?</p> <p>Q: Would you support more local control over (or creative use of) the budget? If so, how might you achieve this?</p> <p>Q: How can we avoid increasing property taxes and still meet growth needs?</p>

Broader Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Communication flow o Relationship building o Outreach o Property Tax o Inclusivity 	<p>Q: What will you do to build a better relationship with parents in the district? What plans do you have to be more inclusive of parental involvement?</p> <p>Q: How will you build relationships with members of the broader community? Which groups, organizations, stakeholders will you specifically target?</p> <p>Q: What is your strategy for communication flow? How will you communicate about both the successes and challenges the school district is facing? How will the community be able to communicate with you?</p> <p>Q: How might you address the perception that the Des Moines school district is in direct competition with outlying suburbs?</p>
Equity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Equal opportunity o Racial discrimination o Diminishes quality 	<p>Q: In what ways will you ensure there is equal opportunity academically and with extracurricular activities across schools?</p> <p>Q: Data suggests harsher disciplinary actions are being taken against nonwhite students. How do you make sense of this data? What sort of policies would you implement to improve racial equality and fair treatment of all students? What sort of professional development programs would you implement in support of this effort?</p> <p>Q: Some suggest that equity is being achieved at the cost of higher achieving students, for example funding for gifted programs are being redirected for needs related to increased diversity. What is your opinion on this?</p>
Values & Character	<p>Q: As a publicly elected leader, who would you emulate? Who do you look up to? Why? What characteristics/values are most important for a school board member?</p>
Legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Relationship building o Teacher support o Local control o Advocacy 	<p>Q: What should the school board relationship with the legislature be? How will you contribute to building this relationship?</p> <p>Q: What should the relationship between city officials and school board look like? How will you achieve this type of relationship?</p>
Health & Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Security o Mental Health o Basic needs o Standards of conduct 	<p>Q: What responsibility does the school hold for the overall health of students? For example, is the district responsible for feeding hungry students? Even in the summer? Should the district be responsible for providing stability to homeless students? What about physical and mental health needs? Who is responsible?</p>

	<p>Q: What principles drive your policies for safety in the school? What guidelines would you require for public or private safety officers? What kind of training will they have?</p> <p>Q: In terms of safety, what are we already doing right? What can be improved? How would you improve it?</p> <p>Q: Many community members believe that teachers no longer hold authority over the classroom. Do you believe that this is a concern? How might you address this concern?</p> <p>Q: How might you support the mental health needs of students/faculty/staff?</p> <p>Q: What role should the school play in overseeing homeschooled children?</p>
<p>Anticipating the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Future threats o Vision o Technology 	<p>Q: What is your 20-year vision for the Des Moines public schools? How might we distinguish our school district in education over the next 20 years?</p> <p>Q: What are the greatest threats facing public education in the future? How might you prepare for these threats now? For example, would a voucher system undermine public education?</p> <p>Q: How might you improve the value of a high school diploma? What should a 21st century diploma reflect? How might we better prepare students for college and non-college paths?</p> <p>Q: What school districts might we learn from? How would you actively seek out guidance from school districts we would like to emulate?</p> <p>Q: What role do you imagine technology playing in (and outside) the classroom in the future? How would you prepare us for this?</p>

Recruitment Strategy: The recruitment strategy for this pilot involved reaching out to: Ballotpedia readers; approximately 100 neighborhood association officers; career educators; professional facilitators; the dialogue and discussion community; social media groups; and personal contacts. Email, phone, and social media were all used, often in combination. Response rates for this program varied by medium but averaged about 1/100. Replication of this pilot on a wider scale will therefore require that Ballotpedia develop a more workable recruitment strategy, which would: begin several months in advance; include multiple channels; and involve the participation of partner organizations.