

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
VALPARAISO, INDIANA
SCHOOL BOARD APPOINTMENT INTERVIEWS
May 1, 2023**

The Common Council of the City of Valparaiso, Indiana, met in special session on Monday, May 1, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in City Hall. Councilmember Casey Schmidt called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Attorney Patrick Lyp took roll call. Present were Councilmembers Reed, Cotton, Schmidt, Pupillo, Anderson, Costas, and Peterson. Attorney Lyp advised there are five applicants. Each will have 25 minutes for answering questions. He will read the question. Sam Camp will keep time giving the candidate a 10, 5 and 1 minute notice. Councilmember Cotton stated that the liaisons have the lion's share of the questions. He asked that councilmembers that are not the liaisons have the opportunity to ask questions first. Councilmember Schmidt replied they will stick with the procedure they have used in the past. The second round of questions they can do it that way. Councilmember Cotton advised it is not Councilmember Schmidt's prerogative to make that determination. He was asking Vice President Reed since she is the liaison with the schools. This is consistent with what he asked for in the Executive Session. Councilmember Reed said hopefully there will be time at the end to ask additional questions.

Karl Cendar

Q – What qualities or strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the Valparaiso School Board? How do you view your role as a school board member?

Karl Cendar – He has been a prior school board member. He serves on other non profit boards. He is a CPA. He has a consulting firm. That background can bring some assistance to the schools.

Q – What has been your level of participation with the Valparaiso School community and School Board meetings?

Karl Cendar – As a Board Member he attended a majority of the meetings. He served as President during a number of years.

Q – What is your vision of a working relationship between the School Board and the School Superintendent?

Karl Cendar – Having a good working relationship is essential to move the school district ahead. It is a collaborative effort. It has open lines of communication.

Q – As a School Board member how would you build relationships and encourage engagement with parents and the community?

Karl Cendar – Everything the Board does has to be transparent. The meetings are live streamed. If someone cannot get to the meeting they can watch it there. The Board meetings have opportunities for public participation. It is important to hear what is on the public’s mind.

Q – Policies will be proposed that teachers, parents and the community do not agree on. What will you consider and be influenced by before voting on any proposed policies?

Karl Cendar – The Board has to have all of the relevant and applicable information on a particular policy or decision we need to make. They need to listen to all opinions and then make a decision that will be best for the kids.

Q - How do you plan to oversee the school budget?

Karl Cendar – His professional career is consulting with local units of government and schools. Using that background he has a lot of knowledge.

Q – When Valparaiso Schools renewed its Operating Referendum did you support or not support its renewal and why? Did you have a role in the process?

Karl Cendar – He was very supportive both times. As you walk through the schools today you can see that was money well spent. The Operating Referendums have been essential too. They need the funds for STEM programs, social workers to work with children with mental health issues, and additional opportunities. The funds have helped make our kids ready for the future and making our schools an excellent school district.

Q – In Indiana we have a structure that causes public school funding to drop when a student leaves the public school to attend a voucher, charter or virtual school. What strategies do you see as necessary to preserve student retention in VCS and/or accommodate funding deficits when actual expenses do not decrease due to those students leaving the corporation?

Karl Cendar – He believes we have a great school system and he does not think this has been a problem. He thinks Valparaiso Schools is a sought after system to be in.

Q – Valparaiso Schools have been experiencing a variety of staff shortages. What do you see as a potential solution?

Karl Cendar – It is his understanding that Valparaiso continues to attract top notch teachers, school administrators and other staff members in the District. He does not feel staff shortages are a significant problem today. We need to continue to look at salaries and benefits and make sure we are paying at a competitive level so we continue to attract and hire top notch teachers and administrators and staff.

Q – Senate Bill 486 includes a provision during this Legislative session to change mandatory discussion language between the professional staff and administration from “shall” to “may” discuss. Should this provision pass, and it did, how would you as a school board member ensure

input from teachers regarding working conditions to maintain the best learning environment for students and the safest working conditions?

Karl Cendar – While he was a school board member there was a Teacher’s Association that meets monthly with the Administration. That has been important for forging good relationships, open communication and collaboration between Administration and the Teacher’s Association. He would want to continue this practice.

Q – Safety at Valparaiso Schools is paramount. One way to foster a safe environment is the placement of school resource officers (SROs) in our schools. Today Valparaiso schools have three SROs. By contrast, Portage has five and Crown Point and Duneland Schools have six. For the upcoming school year, the number of SROs in Valparaiso schools will increase to four, although only one will be assigned to the High School. There is a financial cost to the City and Valparaiso Schools for the placement of SROs. However, would you support adding a second SRO to the High School and increasing the total number of SROs to five?

Karl Cendar – Safety is an important topic. We want to make sure we are doing whatever we can to keep our children safe in our schools. He believes there are discussions going on regarding increasing SROs. He feels they should meet annually to make sure they are doing whatever is possible to keep the children safe and to determine what is the correct number of SROs needed.

Q – Can you support prioritizing funds and seeking grant opportunities to enhance school safety in other ways such as installing 3M window film, technology upgrades, and hardening entry points.

Karl Cendar – He feels the School Board should be taking advantage of whatever grant opportunities are out there whether it is for safety or other educational opportunities. We need to make sure the kids are safe and have best conditions for studying at school.

Q – Name two areas of strength and two areas of weakness or areas of concern in the Valparaiso School System. How will you address these if you are appointed.

Karl Cendar – Areas of concern are the growth component. There needs to be the right number of administrators, teachers and desks for our kids. They have to pay attention and be prepared so if we find ourself with more students, we can have an existing demographic study updated. He doesn’t want to overbuild for a temporary solution. What if there is a population decline?

Q – Tell us about a teacher or school administrator that had a positive lasting impact on your life.

Karl Cendar – Gladis Graber was an accounting professor when he was a freshman in college. She took notice that he was good with numbers and organizing numbers and encouraged him to consider declaring a major in accounting. He is glad he did.

Q – Councilmember Reed. Last year when your term was up you did not reapply. Can you address that please?

Karl Cendar – They had just finished a lengthy process with the Referendum. He thought if it passed it might be a good time for him to take a break. It has been good to have a year off to refocus. He enjoyed his time on the board and cares about the community. If he can use his gifts and talents to help further the School system, he believes he is helping to further the community.

Q – Councilmember Pupillo. In regard to SROs you said follow best practices and listen to the advice of others. What metrics would you consider and whose opinion would you consider?

Karl Cendar – He is not sure he is prepared to say that today. He has been removed from that process. He thinks the Board would want to hear from the Administration. What is working today and what is not. Also hear from our SROs.

Q – Councilmember Cotton. You were on the School Board when the School system had the big budget mess. With your gifts and talents, what was your role in helping stave that off?

Karl Cendar – That was early in his career as a school board member. That first year is a real learning experience. He worked with the other members to right the ship quickly. Now they have built a reserve and have seen revenue increase.

Q – Councilmember Reed. In your application you talk about some of the consulting work you do. Are you currently doing any consulting work with Valparaiso Schools?

Karl Cendar – He is not.

Q – Councilmember Cotton. Are you doing any consulting with the City?

Karl Cendar – They consult for the Redevelopment Commission. He does not view this as a direct conflict with the schools. The schools receive education grants from the Redevelopment Commission. That is a decision by the Redevelopment Commission members.

Q – Councilmember Cotton. The Redevelopment Commission recently said they are going to ask the Schools to take less in the Challenge Grant at a time when the AV is going up. You mentioned that we do not have a significant loss to charter schools. However, we do have circumstances that began as an idea to help a few poor kids get out of perennially bad schools that has now moved to a point where anybody at any income level can qualify for a voucher. To the extent that will now be used, not necessarily because people give their kids the most competitive school but because they want to get away from whatever the circumstances are in a larger school. What is your opinion about the nature of the law in availing vouchers to people without regard to income levels.

Karl Cendar – We need to follow the State law. If parents want to send their children elsewhere they have that opportunity. To be a student here they have to be a resident here.

Ashley Kruse

Q – What qualities or strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the Valparaiso School Board? How do you view your role as a school board member?

Ashley Kruse – She is committed to education. Education is one of the greatest equalizers of opportunity that there is. She knows success is not achieved in isolation, but through the efforts of a greater team. She is a strong strategic and analytical thinker. Her degree in infomatics has given her the tools to analyze complex problems and affective solutions. She has been solving problems in tech for the last 20 years. She has worked with numerous school districts and higher education institutions. She has collaborated, presented and negotiated with numerous boards both in the public and private sector. She brings the perspective of a millennial. It is their children that currently are and are going to be populating schools for the next ten to twenty years. Yet they have no representation on the school board. She brings some great skills and ability to the table that will compliment the current board nicely. Representation matters. The life experiences and the perspectives of this demographic are unique and they are important. She will focus on promoting the education and welfare of the students. She will make sure she is a liaison to the community.

Q – What has been your level of participation with the Valparaiso School community and School Board meetings?

Ashley Kruse – Her oldest child started school during the 2020 pandemic. She relied heavily on the communications from the School Board and the Superintendent. She has followed the School Board the past three years and participated in person and virtually. She is an active member of her school's PTO.

Q – What is your vision of a working relationship between the School Board and the School Superintendent?

Ashley Kruse – She views it as one of checks and balances. The two work collaboratively towards a common goal. Each plays a distinct role. The School Board makes sure the District is running effectively. The Superintendent enforces the policies and implements the day to day operations.

Q – As a School Board member how would you build relationships and encourage engagement with parents and the community?

Ashley Kruse – There is a proven relationship between an informed community and a student's success. She feels Valpo already has really strong ties to the school. She would look to build upon and improve that as much as possible. She would make sure there is alignment with the Board with the messaging. That it is being communicated in an effective way. She would stay engaged in all of the schools.

Q – Policies will be proposed that teachers, parents and the community do not agree on. What will you consider and be influenced by before voting on any proposed policies?

Ashley Kruse - She has spent her career effectively communicating with multiple stakeholders and understanding the needs of each group. The first step is educating herself on the policy and understanding it and why it is being proposed. It is all about making an informed decision for our schools.

Q - How do you plan to oversee the school budget?

Ashley Kruse – This work isn't done alone. She would make sure they are working with District leadership and make sure they are setting a clear goal that is aligned with the needs of the students. She would like the Board to prioritize data driven decision making. Make this all transparent and accessible to the community.

Q – When Valparaiso Schools renewed its Operating Referendum did you support or not support its renewal and why? Did you have a role in the process?

Ashley Kruse – She supported the Referendum. The Referendum is a crucial investment in the schools.

Q – In Indiana we have a structure that causes public school funding to drop when a student leaves the public school to attend a voucher, charter or virtual school. What strategies do you see as necessary to preserve student retention in VCS and/or accommodate funding deficits when actual expenses do not decrease due to those students leaving the corporation?

Ashley Kruse – They need to look into why parents are choosing private or charter schools over public schools. They need to make sure they are providing the top tier of quality education. One of the biggest things is managing class size. Make sure Valpo stays on top of relevant programing and personalized learning for students.

Q – Valparaiso Schools have been experiencing a variety of staff shortages. What do you see as a potential solution?

Ashley Kruse – The best way to uphold a culture is where people feel they are being seen, heard respected and fairly compensated. Need to listen to teachers and staff and respond to the requests as much as possible. Possibly offer flexible schedules. Other schools have implemented health clinics for students and staff. Other schools have offered childcare services. They need to beef up efforts of recruitment to colleges and universities.

Q – Senate Bill 486 includes a provision during this Legislative session to change mandatory discussion language between the professional staff and administration from “shall” to “may” discuss. Should this provision pass, and it did, how would you as a school board member ensure input from teachers regarding working conditions to maintain the best learning environment for students and the safest working conditions?

Ashley Kruse – It is essential to maintain open lines of communication. They need to maintain a culture of trust and transparency with the teachers and staff. Utilize anonymous feedback surveys. There should be regular town hall meetings with teachers and staff.

Q – Safety at Valparaiso Schools is paramount. One way to foster a safe environment is the placement of school resource officers (SROs) in our schools. Today Valparaiso schools have three SROs. By contrast, Portage has five and Crown Point and Duneland Schools have six. For the upcoming school year, the number of SROs in Valparaiso schools will increase to four, although only one will be assigned to the High School. There is a financial cost to the City and Valparaiso Schools for the placement of SROs. However, would you support adding a second SRO to the High School and increasing the total number of SROs to five?

Ashley Kruse – She will always advocate for better and smarter ways to protect our students and staff. We cannot afford to not have trained law enforcement personnel in our schools. She understands the potential for abuse of power and over criminalization of minor offenses. SROs should not create a prison like atmosphere or where our children feel over policed. Student rights should be respected.

Q – Can you support prioritizing funds and seeking grant opportunities to enhance school safety in other ways such as installing 3M window film, technology upgrades, and hardening entry points.

Ashley Kruse – Safety and security is one of the reasons she decided to apply for this appointment. She regularly consults and engineers security solutions for schools and businesses. Improvements can always be made. She would always want to be over prepared and not need it than be under prepared.

Q – Name two areas of strength and two areas of weakness or areas of concern in the Valparaiso School System. How will you address these if you are appointed.

Ashley Kruse – Valpo consistently scores above average on standardized testing. This is a strong area that can be improved and grown. Community involvement is very strong. This was evident during the pandemic. An area to improve upon is the staff to student ratio. Another area is safety and security.

Q – Tell us about a teacher or school administrator that had a positive lasting impact on your life.

Ashley Kruse – Miss S. eighth grade English. She was not particularly well liked. She was a good teacher. She was challenging without overstepping. She was inclusive and observant.

Councilmember Pupillo – You mentioned that you consult and engineer security solutions for schools. What do you do professionally? What can VCS do to improve security and safety at the schools that maybe isn't so obvious?

Ashley Kruse – She is in IT sales and consulting. She works for a consulting agency. They go into schools and do security audits. She finds past employees that still have authorization. She listed a lot of the new technology systems available.

Councilmember Pupillo- In your security audits do you ever find doors being left open? If so, what is being done to rectify that issue?

Ashley Kruse – Not only doors left open. She was at one school and everyone knew the code for the keypad. She has seen locks being taped. This is where sensors come in to play.

Councilmember Cotton - How does her skill with analysis of data compete with an accountant's eye relative to the function of the school board and the budget.

Ashley Kruse – An accountant is specialized in financial data. Infomatics has many subsets. It is understanding and capturing and analyzing data and looking for trends. It also includes the interaction with people and how that affects trends of the data. Accountants are more crunching numbers. Infomatics is more about looking for trends in the data as opposed to balancing the sheet.

Councilmember Costas – What are your views on Critical Race Theory? Should that be taught in schools? What are your thoughts on questionable reading material? How should that be monitored?

Ashley Kruse – This is a complex topic. She feels to some extent it needs to be taught in schools. She knows some people will not like that. They should have an option to opt out if they do not want their children to learn that. As far as book material, it depends on the book, the situation, and the age of the students. If you try to over police what children have access to, they are going to have access to it at some point. She believes some people have moral or religious hesitations and that is a personal choice.

Clay Patton

Q – What qualities or strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the Valparaiso School Board? How do you view your role as a school board member?

Clay Patton – He is an attorney. He represents various municipalities. He is familiar with local budget process. He is familiar with Open Door Law and Public Records. His connection with the school system over the last 45 years is being a K-12 student himself and his two children are in the Valparaiso school system. He will bring a parent's perspective to the school board. He would be a collaborator.

Q – What has been your level of participation with the Valparaiso School community and School Board meetings?

Clay Patton – He has two children in the Valparaiso School system. He was on the Foundation Board for eight years. He was asked to serve on the Community Focus Group when there was a need to hire a new superintendent. He has supported the school system financially. He has not attended School Board meetings except for with the Community Focus Group and a few others as a member of the Foundation. He has read the minutes from the last five years.

Q – What is your vision of a working relationship between the School Board and the School Superintendent?

Clay Patton – It is collaboration. Listening to recommendations of the School Superintendent and the rest of the administration and to ask questions. Why are we doing this? Why is this best for the student? Why is this best for the teachers? Why is this best for the community? Let the administration do the day to day. The school board should be contacted by community members and provide feedback where feedback is needed and sometimes ask the tough questions.

Q – As a School Board member how would you build relationships and encourage engagement with parents and the community?

Clay Payton – He would build relationships the same way he has built his business and personal relationships. Show up. Listen. Pay attention. Be involved. Have conversations with community members.

Q – Policies will be proposed that teachers, parents and the community do not agree on. What will you consider and be influenced by before voting on any proposed policies?

Clay Patton – The first question and the last question should always be what is best for the students. Why is the administration making the recommendation as opposed to alternatives. And, listen to all of the stakeholders involved and let everyone be heard and come up with what is the best solution for the students.

Q - How do you plan to oversee the school budget?

Clay Patton – Review the proposed budget and pay special attention to the wants and needs. Is there a difference between previous years and why. Ask questions of the CFO.

Q – When Valparaiso Schools renewed its Operating Referendum did you support or not support its renewal and why? Did you have a role in the process?

Clay Patton – He voted Yes in 2015 and 2022. He did not actively campaign. He educated himself about the proposals and when asked explained why he was supporting the referendum. He viewed it as an investment not only for his own children but an investment in the community.

Q – In Indiana we have a structure that causes public school funding to drop when a student leaves the public school to attend a voucher, charter or virtual school. What strategies do you see as necessary to preserve student retention in VCS and/or accommodate funding deficits when actual expenses do not decrease due to those students leaving the corporation?

Clay Patton – This has to do with competition. VCS has to put the best product out there possible. Make Valparaiso schools more attractive than alternatives.

Q – Valparaiso Schools have been experiencing a variety of staff shortages. What do you see as a potential solution?

Clay Patton - We need to look at our competition. If we invest in our teachers, we will have a strong foundation for our education and will have parents and students that want to stay here.

There won't be parents that want to send their children somewhere else when you have a strong school system.

Q – Senate Bill 486 includes a provision during this Legislative session to change mandatory discussion language between the professional staff and administration from “shall” to “may” discuss. Should this provision pass, and it did, how would you as a school board member ensure input from teachers regarding working conditions to maintain the best learning environment for students and the safest working conditions?

Clay Patton – Reviewing the school board minutes for the past five years, he sees a collaborative working relationship between the teachers and administration. He doesn't see a change in the law from Indianapolis changing the working relationship between the administration and teachers and the teachers' union.

Q – Safety at Valparaiso Schools is paramount. One way to foster a safe environment is the placement of school resource officers (SROs) in our schools. Today Valparaiso schools have three SROs. By contrast, Portage has five and Crown Point and Duneland Schools have six. For the upcoming school year, the number of SROs in Valparaiso schools will increase to four, although only one will be assigned to the High School. There is a financial cost to the City and Valparaiso Schools for the placement of SROs. However, would you support adding a second SRO to the High School and increasing the total number of SROs to five?

Clay Patton – He would support increasing the SROs including adding a second SRO at the high school. Usually at sporting events there are a couple of officers there. If there is an event at Central Park or a wedding reception, there are a couple of officers there. There are 2,100 students and then add teachers, staff and administration and lunch workers and custodians. There will be about 2,300 people on that school campus. Having a second SRO at VHS is needed.

Q – Can you support prioritizing funds and seeking grant opportunities to enhance school safety in other ways such as installing 3M window film, technology upgrades, and hardening entry points?

Clay Patton – It is usually beneficial when a unit of government can receive funding. But what strings are attached? What is the expense to the school? Or is there a requirement of a local match? The safety of students and staff members should be a priority. He relayed the story of a friend's child that was in school in Newtown, CT. He also presented a screen shot of a VHS student's text with her father during a school lockout and not knowing what to do. The kids are deeply affected by what is happening in this Country and our community. Currently none of the four school board members have children K-12 in the Valparaiso school system. They have five qualified candidates for the next appointment. Four of those candidates, including him, have children in the Valparaiso school system. It would be a shame to not appoint someone who has children in the school system.

Q – Name two areas of strength and two areas of weakness or areas of concern in the Valparaiso School System. How will you address these if you are appointed?

Clay Patton – Drive past any of the school buildings. We are Valpo. We are strong. All the Schools are Vikings. There is strength in the academic standards we have to prepare students for future success. We had the referendum because we didn't have the money. There weren't reserves to pay for buildings. The growth in the area is an indicator that there will be more children. We need to look forward. Another weakness is we are preparing our students for success but are we actually opening the door? Lets get a college resource officer. Get a career resource officer.

Q – Tell us about a teacher or school administrator that had a positive lasting impact on your life.

Clay Patton – His fourth grade teacher at Cooks Corners – Miss Townsend. She taught him to always be prepared. The connections he has maintained from VCF have been rewarding.

Councilmember Costas – What are your thoughts on CRT? Should it be taught in schools? And questionable reading materials?

Clay Patton – He thinks CRT is a phrase that is used a lot. He doesn't think it is being taught in our schools now. If it is not being taught now, it is up to the administration as to what is and is not being taught. It is not something the school board needs to consider until it is brought to it by the administration. He represents the Public Library. There is a process and procedures for people to bring those complaints. That is a case by case basis.

Councilmember Cotton – There have been certain instances when you are an under represented minority that you do not feel like you own your space. Do you have any thoughts or understanding of what best practices can be done and is there a need to encourage the administration to be sensitive to some of the things that are associated with under represented minorities?

Clay Patton – He thinks diversity can make a community stronger. This community is much more diverse than when he was growing up and we are all the better for it. It is something that will continue as the community grows.

Councilmember Cotton – He is talking about the quality of life for the kids. It is isolated and it is not something he expected Clay to have knowledge of. There is a certain sense that more could be done with regard to the basic relationship of under represented minorities in the school system. It probably is not a fair question but it is certainly something that any changing community should be sensitive to with regard to the dynamic of under represented minorities versus majority populations.

Alison Quackenbush

Q – What qualities or strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the Valparaiso School Board? How do you view your role as a school board member?

Alison Quackenbush – She has two children who are in the Valparaiso Community School District. The current Board does not have fresh faces or people who have children in the school

district. She taught middle school. Her current job is digesting information in order to make decisions and assess risk. This transfers over to the School Board. She is a community builder.

Q – What has been your level of participation with the Valparaiso School community and School Board meetings?

Alison Quackenbush – She has followed school board meetings and issues in every community she has lived in. During COVID she was on the Executive Board for Valpo Americans. They did move forward with their season but did so with modifications and coordination with the school’s COVID person.

Q – What is your vision of a working relationship between the School Board and the School Superintendent?

Alison Quackenbush – She will have a meeting with each of the Board members to see how things are going. She will want to get the strategic plan. She will review all budgets in detail. A board member functions as a collector of ideas. The superintendent does not need five bosses. It is a Board member’s function to work with the president so there is a good funnel of information.

Q – As a School Board member how would you build relationships and encourage engagement with parents and the community?

Alison Quackenbush – She is on multiple boards and committees. The school board should be a community asset and everyone should be able to approach it.

Q – Policies will be proposed that teachers, parents and the community do not agree on. What will you consider and be influenced by before voting on any proposed policies?

Alison Quackenbush – Compromise does not mean that everyone is happy about everything. As a school board member you have to be listening through the lens of four different groups. The students. The parents. Teachers. And our community. You also have to balance the strategic focus of three things. Educational achievement. Physical and mental safety. The Schools are an economic driver.

Q - How do you plan to oversee the school budget?

Alison Quackenbush – She has overseen lots of budgets. The School Board is the hiring and firing of the Superintendent. Her goal is not to ask why \$20 was spent on “this”. She wants to provide input and knowledge. She is hoping there is a check and balance.

Q – When Valparaiso Schools renewed its Operating Referendum did you support or not support its renewal and why? Did you have a role in the process?

Alison Quackenbush – She supported the Referendum. She grew up watching how referendums were the main stay of how Naperville schools were so successful. She was involved with another project so did not take an active role in the most recent referendum.

Q – In Indiana we have a structure that causes public school funding to drop when a student leaves the public school to attend a voucher, charter or virtual school. What strategies do you see as necessary to preserve student retention in VCS and/or accommodate funding deficits when actual expenses do not decrease due to those students leaving the corporation?

Alison Quackenbush – She would hope the budget is forecast on 95% capacity. There should be two lists. One for when there is a surplus and one for when they are operating at a deficit. There are always going to be people in the community that will not be captured. They want to do a different method. Every administrator in each building should know what percentage they are missing. What she is most concerned about is families that start in the system and then leave.

Q – Valparaiso Schools have been experiencing a variety of staff shortages. What do you see as a potential solution?

Alison Quackenbush – Recruiting is tough. She had to help hire 500 people for an e-business company. Exit interviews should be a part of the process. She hopes HR has a recruiting function. She wants to leverage the current teachers. They know where the talent is. There are incentives that can be given to encourage teachers to stay and new ones to come.

Q – Senate Bill 486 includes a provision during this Legislative session to change mandatory discussion language between the professional staff and administration from “shall” to “may” discuss. Should this provision pass, and it did, how would you as a school board member ensure input from teachers regarding working conditions to maintain the best learning environment for students and the safest working conditions?

Alison Quackenbush – She has heard there are some great aspects of this Bill. They are looking at streamlining the assessments and valuations. That is great. She is a proponent of open communication. The fact that rules are placed on it seems silly especially when we are in a recruiting challenged environment. She would make sure there is always an open door from a teacher to an administrator perspective.

Q – Safety at Valparaiso Schools is paramount. One way to foster a safe environment is the placement of school resource officers (SROs) in our schools. Today Valparaiso schools have three SROs. By contrast, Portage has five and Crown Point and Duneland Schools have six. For the upcoming school year, the number of SROs in Valparaiso schools will increase to four, although only one will be assigned to the High School. There is a financial cost to the City and Valparaiso Schools for the placement of SROs. However, would you support adding a second SRO to the High School and increasing the total number of SROs to five?

Alison Quackenbush – She is supportive of people who are trained. The teachers have not studied public safety as it relates to criminals. She is a proponent of an additional person. Administrators want to focus on teaching not what the latest camera technology is.

Q – Can you support prioritizing funds and seeking grant opportunities to enhance school safety in other ways such as installing 3M window film, technology upgrades, and hardening entry points?

Alison Quackenbush – She hopes there is a grant person on the team. Why would you want to leave money on the table?

Q – Name two areas of strength and two areas of weakness or areas of concern in the Valparaiso School System. How will you address these if you are appointed?

Alison Quackenbush – Valpo schools does an amazing job of having excellence in three areas. Academic excellence. The arts programs are incredible. Sports and athletics. There is a great trajectory in test scores. She would like to see a high ability math program in the elementaries. Having a paraprofessional in the classroom for special ed makes a big difference.

Q – Tell us about a teacher or school administrator that had a positive lasting impact on your life.

Alison Quackenbush – She had many. She had a teacher who encouraged her to run for student body president for Naperville High School. She ran and was the first Freshman to be elected.

Curtiss Strietelmeier

Q – What qualities or strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the Valparaiso School Board? How do you view your role as a school board member?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He has four strengths. He is a longtime resident of Valparaiso school district. He has kids who attend here. He has seen what is available for students in the community. He can bring the parent’s aspect to the Board from Kindergarten through graduation. He was a former educator. He has been a Title I tutor, elementary school teacher, director of technology, and school superintendent. He understands the system. In his current role he works with school systems across the country to discuss funding.

Q – What has been your level of participation with the Valparaiso School community and School Board meetings?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He has been to school board meetings in his career quite a few times. With the Valparaiso School Board, he has not been to many because he has not had a reason to. The school board does a great job. As far as the community as a whole, he has a number of kids in the schools so he is always at activities.

Q – What is your vision of a working relationship between the School Board and the School Superintendent?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – The Superintendent is the CEO of a very large company. As a school board we have hired him to do that role. The school board needs to let him do his job. The Board needs to be out in the public promoting a positive attitude.

Q – As a School Board member how would you build relationships and encourage engagement with parents and the community?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – Make sure you are listening. Make sure you get back to people. He is at many school activities. He will listen to people.

Q – Policies will be proposed that teachers, parents and the community do not agree on. What will you consider and be influenced by before voting on any proposed policies?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – There are four questions: How will this impact students? What is the impact on the community as a whole? How will this impact the school budget? Understanding the policies and how they align with the stated goals and objectives.

Q - How do you plan to oversee the school budget?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He does not see himself looking at day to day budget expenditures. If there is a big change the Board should be involved. There are six questions: Why this solution? How does this support the district mission and goals? Who are you working with? Where is this being done? When will this go into place? When will this expire? What is your plan?

Q – When Valparaiso Schools renewed its Operating Referendum did you support or not support its renewal and why? Did you have a role in the process?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He supported the Referendum. Good communities have good schools.

Q – In Indiana we have a structure that causes public school funding to drop when a student leaves the public school to attend a voucher, charter or virtual school. What strategies do you see as necessary to preserve student retention in VCS and/or accommodate funding deficits when actual expenses do not decrease due to those students leaving the corporation?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He understands open enrollment. Students leave or come in for one of two reasons: opportunity or environment. When a student leaves there needs to be a discussion to know why. Are the right people in place.

Q – Valparaiso Schools have been experiencing a variety of staff shortages. What do you see as a potential solution?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – Shortages come from: a lack of candidates, inability to hire talent, retaining staff.

Q – Senate Bill 486 includes a provision during this Legislative session to change mandatory discussion language between the professional staff and administration from “shall” to “may” discuss. Should this provision pass, and it did, how would you as a school board member ensure input from teachers regarding working conditions to maintain the best learning environment for students and the safest working conditions?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – It can be written into policy that this will happen. The Board has to show that this is important. It should not matter if it says “shall” or “may”. It is their expectation.

Q – Safety at Valparaiso Schools is paramount. One way to foster a safe environment is the placement of school resource officers (SROs) in our schools. Today Valparaiso schools have three SROs. By contrast, Portage has five and Crown Point and Duneland Schools have six. For the upcoming school year, the number of SROs in Valparaiso schools will increase to four, although only one will be assigned to the High School. There is a financial cost to the City and Valparaiso Schools for the placement of SROs. However, would you support adding a second SRO to the High School and increasing the total number of SROs to five?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – Yes he would support this. A school the size of VHS should have two. The SROs need to be treated different than a police officer. He needs to have the training to know how to work with students in crisis. They need to be seen as authoritative and a support.

Q – Can you support prioritizing funds and seeking grant opportunities to enhance school safety in other ways such as installing 3M window film, technology upgrades, and hardening entry points?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – He did three presentations today on ways to find school funding for security. There are a number of grants out there. He believes it is important to include those resources. He wants schools to be schools. If you go too far it becomes a prison atmosphere instead of a teaching atmosphere. He would rather prioritize funds on social workers.

Q – Name two areas of strength and two areas of weakness or areas of concern in the Valparaiso School System. How will you address these if you are appointed?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – A strength is what we have to offer in academics. Great athletic opportunities. We also have a supportive community. There is a lack of pre-school vision. There is inconsistency in programming.

Q – Tell us about a teacher or school administrator that had a positive lasting impact on your life.

Curtiss Strietelmeier – The first one is his wife. Seeing what teachers go through and how their families have to adjust to their career. In high school he had a journalism teacher. He learned from him how to have your own voice.

Councilmember Pupillo – In regard to SROs at Westville.

Curtiss Strietelmeier – We had one SRO. It was a K-12 building. They worked with the LaPorte County Sheriff. They had a State grant that supported the SROs. There were 900 students.

Councilmember Cotton – Nationally we have a teacher shortage. A lot of the remedies tend to be local instead of national. Give him some insight into how to turn the corner. Is it just compensation?

Curtiss Strietelmeier – No. There is the opportunity of respect and opportunity. Let the teacher teach. Let them do what they were trained to do.