

UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
CANDIDATE QUESTIONS 2012

Tami Pyfer

1. Describe the qualifications and experiences you would bring to the State Board of Education and how they would be an asset to the work of the Board.

I am the ***mother of 5 children***; four adult children who graduated from Logan High School, and a son who will graduate this spring. I have spent 24 years in the schools, volunteering in the classroom, serving in PTA and as PTA President, sitting on a school site-based committee, and as an elected Community Council Member. While my children have, for the most part, attended public schools, I homeschooled my oldest son for part of 7th grade and enrolled him in a private school for his 8th grade year due to academic problems related to undiagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. ***My personal experience with children who succeed and children who struggle in school is a tremendous asset to me as a Board member. In addition, my volunteer experience over the years gives me a broad perspective on the day-to-day challenges and successes found in our schools.***

I have been ***involved with the Logan Schools Foundation*** for nearly 16 years, serving as a board member, board president and Director for 7 years, and now as an ad hoc committee member. I served as co-chair of the Utah Association of Public Schools Foundation (UAPSF) and helped facilitate the work of nonprofit school foundations across the state. The work of these foundations involves building partnerships with businesses, alumni, community members and other nonprofit organizations in an effort to enhance educational opportunities for our students, providing programs, materials and projects that cannot be funded through the normal budgetary process. ***My experience with the Logan Schools Foundation and the UAPSF has given me a broad perspective on programs that are important to the business community and to private donors, along with avenues of additional revenue and support outside of the state's education budget.***

I have am ***very active in community service***, having served 8 years on the Logan City Council, 4 years as Neighborhood Council Chair, and currently founder and director of the Logan Citizens' Academy – a program designed to educate citizens about municipal government. I am a County Delegate with the Republican Party, and am proud to support my husband as our precinct's State Delegate. ***My work in community government has given me a better understanding of the relationship between healthy businesses and successful schools. It has also prepared me to seek out win-win situations and look for areas of compromise when faced with opposing viewpoints and goals.***

I have been employed at Utah State University for the past 9 years as a ***Clinical Instructor in the Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation Department*** where I teach undergraduate classes and supervise student teachers. My undergraduate and graduate degrees are in Special Education, and I am trained as a special education teacher. I teach distance classes, online classes and hybrid classes (combination of on-campus and online instruction) in the areas of Assistive Technology, Introduction to Special Education, and Preschool Assessment and Program Planning. In addition to my university work, I enjoy a relationship with Claremont College and Vanderbilt University, working as a Faculty Trainer for the IRIS Center. I train faculty members across the country on how to utilize free, evidence-based, online materials in their teacher-training programs. ***My experience training teachers for Utah classrooms, along with my work with online and distance instructional models has already been a tremendous benefit to my work on the State Board and will be invaluable as we move toward more digital-based instruction and improve our public and higher ed partnerships.***

I have served on the State Board of Education for the past two years, having been appointed by the Governor to fill the remaining three years of an unexpired term. ***My past two years of work on the board has given me insight and experience that will be an asset to the State Board of Education.***

2. Name three key things you would like to accomplish as a member of the State Board of Education.

- Continue to enhance and improve Board Members' communication with Legislators and LEAs. Shortly after I was appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Board, I worked with Board Leadership to create a Communications Committee of the USBE. I saw a tremendous need for our board members to reach out develop relationships with their legislators, and also for board members to be more proactive in gathering information and feedback from LEAs. So much of what happens in public education is based on what happens during the legislative session, which is why I believe these relationships and sharing of information is critical.
- Find ways to embrace digital learning without losing quality of instruction. As someone who teaches through and with technology, I believe that we have some tremendous opportunities to utilize technology to improve instruction. However, this transformation must be done in a thoughtful, intentional manner. Contrary to what some people think, it's not as simple as plopping a child down in front of a computer!
- Make it easier for parents, community members, educators and legislators to access information about state education issues. This would include better public relations-type work by the Board itself, improved outreach by Board Members in their communities, and a focused effort to involve parents in the legislative process.

3. What do you think are the two biggest issues or challenges facing public education in the state of Utah? Why?

- One of the biggest challenges I've seen in the past two years is addressing the amount of misinformation and inadequate information about public education that tends to influence critical pieces of education-related legislation. Decisions are often made without fully vetting proposals and inviting input from those most affected by the outcome. The 2012 legislative session's overhaul of the 2011 SB65 Statewide Online Education bill is a great illustration of this problem.
- Another challenge I see facing public education in Utah is the meeting the increased expectations of the community (educating a more diverse student population, higher academic standards, increased educational opportunities, etc) within the existing financial constraints. Utah has always been able to do more with less, but the reality is that there is only so much "more" that can be achieved with "less."

4. Describe the efforts you would make to communicate with your constituents and bring all stakeholders (state board, local boards, legislature, educators, parents) together to enhance public education.

If re-elected to the State Board of Education, I would continue to engage in the outreach that I have been doing for the past two years. A few examples of this outreach are included below.

- A few months after I was appointed to the Board I scheduled a meeting with the 4 legislators that represent Cache Valley. In this meeting I presented a packet of information on pertinent issues such as the new Utah Core that was being adopted, school funding issues, etc. I continue to communicate on a regular basis with these as well as other legislators whom I've formed relationships with the past 2 years.

- As a Board member I disseminate information to parents through Facebook and email. Some of these posts are calls to action during the legislative session and others just an update of changes happening in education in Utah.
- I have been invited to – and have invited myself to – Community Council meetings where I report on Board activities as well as pertinent legislation. I recently organized delegate trainings for Community Council members in Morgan, Box Elder, Logan and Cache districts.
- I regularly email school boards, educators, and superintendents asking for input on issues being considered by the State Board. In one case last year, this communication was critical as I arranged to have district literacy specialists attend Committee hearings during the legislative session in which changes to literacy assessment was being discussed. Because of the input of these district leaders, adjustments were made in the legislation.
- While attending a Charter School Association conference last summer I overheard a group of Charter principals discussing the problems presented by SB65, the Statewide Online Education bill. I had already been hearing similar concerns from administrators in district schools, but sought out specific feedback from a local Charter principal and gathered more information which helped me then inform legislators about the “unintended consequences” this bill had on Charters.

I am on Facebook and Twitter, and have a website that will be remodeled and reactivated this summer, if I am chosen to be on the ballot.

5. What would you do to improve the academic preparation of students as well as their transition to higher education or other post-high-school training?

In 2010 the State Board of Education adopted new Utah Core standards. This was done in order to improve the academic rigor in English Language Arts and Math, and to better prepare students for college, careers, or other post-high training. These standards were developed by looking at the expectations of students entering college or other post-high programs or careers, and then “back-mapping” the competencies that students must attain at each at each grade level, i.e., 12th grade, then 11th, 10th, etc. in order to be college or career ready. If re-elected to the State Board of Education I would continue to support the transition to the Utah Core standards, and support teachers, schools and districts as they work to implement these standards.

In addition, I would continue my current participation on the Northern Utah K-16 Alliance. We meet quarterly with superintendents across four school districts, legislators, and administration from Utah State University and Bridgerland Applied Technology Center. I believe it’s my responsibility at these meetings to learn where the “gaps” are between public education an higher education/technical training and then take this information back to our Board where we can use it to inform our strategic planning.