



Valerie Jeffers
Board of Education Candidate

1. Tell us about yourself and your connection to the Elizabeth School District.

While six months pregnant with my younger daughter, I moved to Thunderhill subdivision July 4th, weekend 1994. My older daughter started Running Creek Elementary as a 2nd grader and was in 4th grade when Singing Hills Elementary first opened in our neighborhood. She attended all Elizabeth C-1 Schools, starting in 2nd grade, and was a freshman when the high school first opened. My younger daughter went through the Elizabeth C-1 Schools from pre-school through graduating from Frontier in 2012.

While my daughters attended elementary school, I served as a parent volunteer specifically assisting with spelling tests, end of year field days, and a variety of other miscellaneous tasks as requested by the teachers.

From 2008 – 2010, I worked with the Elizabeth C-1 schools to bring teachers snacks during parent / teacher meetings, brought “goodies” during teacher appreciation week, and always made sure I purchased additional supplies as I understood the financial struggles our educators go through. My fondest memory was presenting the Valedictorian at Frontier High School with a brand-new laptop. She was very excited and told me she so appreciated the gift as she knew it would come in handy for college.

Being new to Elizabeth and desiring to get involved with the school system, my initial connections were through school board meetings and parent teacher conferences. Understanding the importance of being fiscally conservative yet providing the items necessary to our educators to help our kids be successful, has always been my priority.

Talking with teachers, asking questions of the students, and involving myself in the many aspects of school activities have always been my goals. Another way I have engaged with school district happenings has been to reach out to parents to help. It is important that we as

parents are involved in our students' academic lives, making sure our kids know and understand the values that shape productive citizens. As we know, this is about the kids; we as parents understand (more than anyone) what our kids need to become contributing members of society. Without parental involvement and input, these ideals may become lost.

2. What would your goals be as a member of the Elizabeth Schools Board of Education?

My goals include but are not limited to:

- Work with the BEST Grant Program, to help replace the Elizabeth Middle School
- Focus on teacher-centric budgets; assist with bringing continuing education opportunities to the district; raise salaries so our educators don't move out of our district after their first couple of years of teaching (using our district as a training ground), thereby lowering the turnover rate for new educators
- Focus on all students' needs –
 - Being sensitive to providing educational opportunities for individuals who have no desire to attend traditional college
 - Open opportunities for – trade school / apprentice programs
- Work with local banks and businesses – creating scholarship programs, helping our students with the high cost of continuing education. Create a nurturing environment for our community, as a whole
- Work with local community colleges to create more dual enrollment programs; offer college courses to students while still in school
 - Create the same opportunities for the trades – apprentice programs; offering programs other than conventional college
- Work with organizations like Habitat for Humanity to assist students in obtaining volunteer hours as well as learning a trade. Partner with this organization through their scholarship programs
- Create a variety of programs for parent involvement – making sure our kids become civic-minded, successful members of society and making sure that parents' voices are heard by the district
- Ensuring every parent understands the meaning behind, as well as reasons for, Common Core Standards –
 - students' understanding of the need to research and base their homework assignments on facts vs. personal experiences/opinions is key in building the students' world knowledge
 - regarding mathematics – require students to understand the concepts and “the why and how” from which they derived their answers
 - having my own learning disabilities and having a child who was on an IEP, it has always been important for me to be involved and know which support tools

were necessary to ensure academic success

- As a side note – being wholly invested in my daughter’s education, meeting with educators, and understanding what steps were taken to ensure her success, I am cognizant of the processes involved that enabled her to test out of several entry level college math classes

In summary, create an environment where the students feel like they have many opportunities to explore, generating excitement for our scholastic community where both kids and parents want to be involved.

3. What do you think will be the top issue facing the Elizabeth School District over the next five years? How should the issue be addressed?

The biggest issue I see for our school district is student attendance. What I mean by student attendance is – how many students are leaving, going to Douglas County schools instead of finishing their education in Elizabeth?

The main reasons for this departure are:

- The percentage of students achieving proficiency in math is 20% - 24% which is lower than the Colorado 33% average (School Year 2016 – 2017)
- Perception that there are more options provided by neighboring schools in both academics and/or athletics.

Addressing the issue: reiterating the opportunities the BEST grant programs offer to improve facilities; seeking out grants that specifically support staff and teacher training; ensuring that new teachers receive ongoing mentoring from experienced teachers.

Also important is creating an environment where parents desire to be involved: creating synergy between educators and parents where the parents know the “what” and understand the “why” of curriculum being taught; connecting classroom learning to everyday life lessons; giving permission for both parents and students to ask any and all questions that might concern them; making sure that parents and students understand that voicing differences of opinion and asking questions respectfully is always okay.

To begin to reverse the trend of student departure from our district, we must allow parents to have more voice in the educational process. Get involved, understand that these are your kids; it is up to all of us to ensure that our students can access the best opportunities available. If parents see a void, a lack of something that needs to be addressed, make sure they feel empowered to stand up and make their voices heard. Why aren’t more parents attending

school board meetings? Why aren't more parents involved in PTA programs? Involving parents more fully in decision-making policies and engaging more directly with the parents will improve communications and hopefully resolve some of Elizabeth School District's "early exit" issues with our student population.

The most important goals to ensure an end to student departure are: 1) creating an educational platform where students can excel in their studies and learning capabilities, and 2) making our schools places where parents want their students to attend, and students are excited to join.

4. What is your vision for Elizabeth Schools and how would you support this as a member of the Board of Education?

My vision for Elizabeth Schools is one that will create and utilize programs that will help both the educational process as well as create opportunities for everyone involved, with the focus being on students and teachers. The specific opportunities will create an environment where both teacher and student feel they have the resources available to be successful. The educator can be successful because we have given him or her the tools to teach. The students can be successful because they have been given the tools to succeed scholastically and productively as a member of society. Understanding this also requires parental involvement.

My plan for implementation will include but will not be limited to:

- Working with and listening to both the students and their parents to ensure we are achieving the educational goals that are important to them and then assist educators with reaching these goals.
- Walking that fine line of fiscal conservancy and still making sure our educators and students have the tools they need to succeed will be essential.
- Bringing together a nonpartisan point of view, ensuring every voice and view point is heard and respected.
- Ensuring that every student and parent has a voice; that every teacher is provided with the tools they need to be successful; that a collaborative approach is created to achieve overall success.
- Creating programs for parents to be involved in their child's education.
Taking into account, not all parents have the time or understanding of how to become involved, focus on creating a variety programs that will encourage and entice connections with the school district.

Having had a student who struggled with a learning disability, I understand the challenges and frustrations the students, teachers, and parents experienced.

Hoping and praying my child would make it through and understand the homework, the assignments, and completing all requirements for graduation was extremely stressful.

The key word to all my goals and aspirations as a school board member would be “teamwork.” By this, I am referring to the importance of students, teachers and parents interacting on a regular and consistent basis to make our school district the best it can possibly be. Strategizing toward that goal is my commitment to the voters in Elizabeth School District.