

# Coalition for Racial Justice Questionnaire Responses 2015 ICCSD Candidates

An email containing the following five questions was sent to all 13 candidates in the 2015 ICCSD election on August 19. We informed all candidates that the deadline for inclusion in this publication was August 28. The answers that we received appear below, unedited other than to add the candidate’s photo and to format the answers to each question for our readers’ comparison. Thank you to the candidates who responded.

1. What do you believe is the most important information or message concerning schools, the school district and education in the Coalition for Racial Justice’s Report “Racial Equity in Iowa City and Johnson County?” (A copy of the report can be found at [www.racialjusticecoalition.com](http://www.racialjusticecoalition.com))

<p><b>LaTasha DeLoach</b></p> 	<p>The entire section is important and interconnected; understanding equity requires that we look at multiple areas simultaneously.</p> <p>The area of the report that is most interesting to me is the section on "how do we move forward?" It's imperative that we begin using some type of "vulnerable populations impact statement" with each policy we put in place. When implemented appropriately, an impact statement, or analysis of how a particular policy might impact vulnerable populations, will assist with forward movement in regards to equity, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and many other vulnerable and protected groups.</p> <p>It's also essential that those using this tool and those in decision-making positions receive ongoing education about implicit bias and cultural sensitivity as our district continues to grow in diversity. If we lack that understanding of diversity at the school board level, we will fail to make strides.</p> <p>Though I'm using the term vulnerable populations, it's important to also recognize that though these groups <i>are</i> vulnerable, they are not weak nor helpless, but resilient and strong. They endure situations that many of us are unfamiliar with in our daily lives or lived histories.</p>
<p><b>Shawn Eyestone</b></p> 	<p>The four statistics listed for AP class enrollment, graduation rates, Special Education enrollment, and Police referrals clearly show a disparity between overall population demographics and educational opportunities and realities. The report makes a good point of not trying to assume why these variances occur, but to simply make it known that they are real. That is something I find important. Many times, when people are supplied with an uncomfortable statistic, they will quickly come up with a reason for it that makes it less significant. The reasons for these disparities are vital to understand. Not as excuses, but for understanding of what needs to be addressed to affect change.</p>

**Todd Fanning did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Phil Hemingway**



I feel the most disturbing statistic revealed by this study is the underrepresentation of students of color and mixed racial heritage in AP Courses, and their disproportionate representation in Special Education plus suspensions and police referrals. Sadly this statistic is not relegated to the corridor area and is in many ways endemic in our society. Our district's special education programs were investigated by the office of civil rights because of a 2011 citation and this resulted in some changes that could reduce the disproportionate identification of minority students being placed in special education. Our district's Equity Director, Kingsley Botchway, is helping our district's personnel become more culturally competent through presentations and in-services so I do believe we are headed in the right direction. However, there is still a lot to do and it must be a district priority.

**Jason Lewis**



The report reinforces the importance of recognizing where we fall short as a district and as a community. Lower graduation rates, disproportional discipline, and systemic denial of services are all important issues in the school district that require our immediate, undivided attention. In the two years since the report was released, we've seen increased activism toward making these issues real to our leaders and the community, but there is still a lot of work left to do. The ICCSD of 20-30 years ago no longer exists. We need leaders who recognize this and are willing and able to have the difficult, brave conversations necessary to move forward, both at the board table and in our community.

**Chris Liebig**



All of the points in the report are important, but I see the statistics about racial disparities in school discipline, arrests, and incarceration as the issue of greatest concern. I think we will look back decades from now and see the mass incarceration of black people in America as an enormous injustice on a par with Jim Crow (and in some ways worse, partly because it's less visible).

We all want to think that our schools are part of the solution, not part of the problem, but there's always the danger that a large bureaucratic institution is more likely to reproduce society as it is than to transform it. I'm afraid that's what has happened and is happening with the school-to-prison pipeline. In the name of teaching kids about good behavior, schools have used discipline practices (such as zero tolerance policies) that end up pushing kids (and disproportionately minority kids) out of school and into the hands of law enforcement and the justice system.

The Report recommends a combination of consciousness-raising, data-gathering, and robust community input into law enforcement practices, which seems like a smart way forward, since part of the problem is just an unawareness that there is a problem. I'm usually skeptical about the extensive data-gathering that now goes on in schools, but this is one instance where it will be worth the effort.

(For what it's worth, I've tried to play some small role in bringing these issues

<p><b>Chris Liebig</b> <b>cont'd</b></p>	<p>to people’s attention through blogging about them—for example, in these posts:</p> <p><a href="http://patch.com/iowa/iowacity/bp--ten-reasons-not-to-put-armed-police-in-iowa-city-schools">http://patch.com/iowa/iowacity/bp--ten-reasons-not-to-put-armed-police-in-iowa-city-schools</a></p> <p><a href="http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/06/what-supportive-could-mean.html">http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/06/what-supportive-could-mean.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/06/behavior-uber-alles.html">http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/06/behavior-uber-alles.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/04/addicted-to-incarceration.html">http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2012/04/addicted-to-incarceration.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2011/12/kids-as-grist-for-law-enforcement-mill.html">http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2011/12/kids-as-grist-for-law-enforcement-mill.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2013/01/why-not-orange-jumpsuits.html">http://ablogaboutscool.blogspot.com/2013/01/why-not-orange-jumpsuits.html</a> )</p>
--	---

**Brian Richman did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

<p><b>Paul Roesler</b></p> 	<p>We need to address and close the achievement gap between minorities and their peers. If we continue to allow children to fail in their educational experience we also fail as educators. Involving the numerous resources and people that we have in this community to help children succeed is critical. Access to programs, whether it be Pre-K, band, AP courses or sports should not be limited to those with the means to participate we should make sure that we continue to include as much as we can and never exclude. We also need to continue to educate teachers and administrators. We need to give them the tools to be successful in helping close that gap, smaller classes, needed resources and teaching strategies all need to work hand in hand to help close that gap.</p>
---	--

<p><b>Lori Roetlin</b></p> 	<p>Our Black and Latino students are over-represented in multiple areas that have a negative impact on their opportunity to experience success in our school district. Furthermore, these areas have a direct impact on their risk of not graduating, which has lifelong consequences. If we fail to address these issues, we are failing at the most basic purpose of public education: ensuring all of our citizens have the same opportunity to learn, grow, and become engaged members of society. For ALL our students to have equal opportunity for success, we must address these disparities.</p>
--	---

<p><b>Megan Schwalm</b></p> 	<p>I was involved in writing the first Coalition for Racial Justice Equity Report. Our hope was that by publicly sharing the hard facts about racial disproportionality, we could work collaboratively to figure out ways to eliminate those inequities. The report points out ways in which our community treats kids of color differently from others. I believe this is mostly unintentional. I know and trust that our school staff want every child to succeed and that we ALL need to work on discovering the ways our school cultures and practices unfortunately do not serve each and every child. There is a great deal of work ahead of us! I expect that our school staff will take the reins and reflect on their own work to learn ways that the culture and climate they are part of could adversely affect students of color. I don't expect our community to be perfect, but I want to live and raise my children in a community that puts forward serious effort to overcome implicit bias and disproportionality. Together I believe we can make tremendous strides toward racial equity. As a board member, I will be committed to addressing the issues raised in the CRJ's equity report.</p>
<p><b>Lucas Van Orden did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	
<p><b>Brianna Wills did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	
<p><b>Tom Yates</b></p> 	<p>The most important item in the report regarding both education and racial disparity in general is the statement that the causes of racial disparity are hard to determine. It is a credit to the authors that they admit this, and a real deterrent to solving the problems. While there is a practice in the U.S. of collecting and analyzing data, at the end of the day it is just data. It CAN be a tool for looking for solutions, but I would rather spend time trying to find things that <b>work</b> rather than looking at data.</p>

2. Please describe the similarities and differences you have observed or know about between experiences children of different races or ethnic origins have in the Iowa City Community School District?

<p><b>LaTasha DeLoach</b></p>	<p>The similarities are simple: All of our children in our district are in a free, public education system, which means every child has the right to receive a quality education--one that is not dependent on how much money their family has, or the amount of melanin in their skin, or the language that they speak.</p> <p>Differences can be seen through many metrics related to student engagement, such as attendance, discipline, AP classes, "participation" in classrooms, acknowledgment of their culture, and positive imagery of people from their racial groups within their school building, classrooms, and lessons--as well as teachers and administrators in our district.</p>
	<p>Many times children of different races are seen as a package deal. They are identified as a group more so than as individuals. This is more evident for children of color. I have heard phrases such as "those kids" or "Chicago kids". These are thinly veiled ways of saying Black kids. I am white. My children are white. I have never heard of them being referred to as "those kids" or anything else. We can't expect anyone to feel welcome in our community if they are constantly being labelled as an outsider. I will say that these comments are more prevalent from parents than district staff. As part of the DPO, I have had the privilege to visit all of the schools in our district during school hours. I see the kids in classroom situations as well as travelling between areas. I see teachers who care about all of their students equally. I see kids who interact with kids regardless of race. When treated as individuals instead of groups, the kids can really prosper.</p>
<p><b>Todd Fanning did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	
<p><b>Phil Hemingway</b></p>	<p>I believe the parents and families raising children of every race and ethnic origin share a desire and devotion to maximize their children's individual talents and skills. We want all children to become productive members of our community, our state, and the global market place. We are blessed to live in a culturally diverse community where most people are tolerant of others regardless of their cultural background, race, socioeconomic status (SES), sexual preference or gender identity. However, not everyone embraces the diversity represented in our school district nor do they display the cultural competence required to deal with problems that do arise in an equitable manner. For example, when a gun was found on a student at West High, the school was never placed on lock down and parents were not notified until days later. In fact the police were enlisted in a low profile manner that kept the situation and the school itself out of the news. In sharp contrast, when a fight happened outside our alternative high school, Tate, every law enforcement entity short of the National Guard was called in, Sycamore Mall</p>
	

<p><b>Phil Hemingway</b> cont'd</p>	<p>was placed on lock down and the entire area cordoned off. Of course this resulted in a great deal of sensational press coverage. Would this have occurred if the demographic of the student body was made up of predominately white, high SES students? Perhaps not.</p>
<p><b>Jason Lewis</b></p> 	<p>The biggest similarity I've seen throughout the whole district is the commitment our teachers have to our students. As a parent at Mark Twain Elementary I'm continually in awe of the dedication our teachers and staff have for the children they teach. Twain is an incredibly diverse school and the teachers must be able to differentiate their teaching to reach their students. They do this at an exceptional level. This has benefitted my family. My daughter struggled with early reading benchmarks and because her kindergarten teacher was so attuned to the different skill levels and needs of her students, she was able to recognize my child's issue and place her in reading recovery. 5 years later, my daughter won't leave the house without a book. If not for the dedication of those Twain teachers, she and many of her classmates would have received less. In spite of the challenges a diverse population presents, the teachers and staff at Twain have created a loving, open, responsive environment that should be an example to our district and celebrated.</p> <p>The differences children of different races and ethnicities often face are often entrenched in the systems we put in place. The bureaucracy of the district is not attuned and responsive to the students needs in the same way our teachers often are. We are making efforts to close this gap with the creation of the district's Comprehensive Equity Plan, but we need only look back a few days to the issue of providing bussing for students at Alexander Elementary to realize that blind spots exist in our policies and our leadership. I was happy to see the board make the right choice and provide the needed bussing, but I was dismayed that it took a huge outpouring of community feedback to transmit the message. Examples of this kind of oversight are readily available throughout our district and we need to elect school board members who are experienced and attuned to the concerns of our diverse populations.</p>
<p><b>Chris Liebig</b></p> 	<p>It's very hard to generalize here, because every child is an individual, and we're talking about larger patterns that don't necessarily manifest themselves in every kid of a particular race or ethnic origin. I've seen kids who are African-American and whose lives bear a lot of similarities to those of my own kids, and I've seen white kids whose lives are very different. For example, my kids, who are white, have classmates from African-American, Latino, and mixed race families that they've been in the same classes with since kindergarten. At the same time, I remember kids who appeared in their classes after transferring from another school and who then left for yet another school after just a short time. I don't know the stories behind those brief appearances, but I know that some kids are dealing with a lot more challenges in their homes lives than others, and that those challenges, like many identified in the Report, fall disproportionately on kids from racial and ethnic minorities.</p>

<p><b>Chris Liebig</b> <b>cont'd</b></p>	<p>I have a friend who has worked as an art teacher in some of the district's autism classrooms. She says that the experience made her realize that what kids in those classrooms need first from the school system is "acceptance, compassion, and love." I remember the quote just because it is so unusual in the school system (which can be so caught up in the daily grind of processing people and tasks) to hear words like those even spoken. I think she would say the same thing about kids dealing with the challenges that racial and ethnic minorities face. I wonder in particular about acceptance—about whether kids from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds ever feel the same kind of acceptance in school that many white kids probably unconsciously assume and take for granted.</p> <p>There are lots of dedicated staff in our district who not only have good intentions but work very hard to do their best by kids with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, but I worry that there are so many ways that the system treats minority kids as obstacles or distractions or problems to be solved, and I can only imagine how it must feel to be on the receiving end of that over a long period of time.</p>
--	---

**Brian Richman did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

<p><b>Paul Roesler</b></p> 	<p>My personal experience is two fold. On one hand my wife teaches at a highly diverse school in Mark Twain. Our conversations about her experiences there and the stories she has shared about kids is one of the reasons that I am seeking a seat on the board, I want to be able to help. At Twain one of the toughest things to they face is the transient population they have. Kids are coming and going constantly, this makes it hard on the teachers and students to constantly be in a groove. If kids are coming and going teachers are forced to get kids caught up as best as they can to the other kids. Schools that don't have this same amount of kids coming and going are able to continue to move forward and teachers don't have to go . Twain also has a lot of children who either they themselves or their parents do not speak english. As the parents and teachers struggle to communicate it makes involvement in education difficult. The other personal experience that I have is at my children's school, Lemme. Currently that school is made of a majority of white kids and their main diversity is the hispanic populations of children that are being bussed their from Breckenridge. Aside from the language barrier transportation is also a problem for these Lemme Leopards. The distance from Breckenridge to Lemme is great, there is no city bus and sometimes the only way that families can get to the school for conferences or the various family activities is through carpooling or rides from the neighborhood center. There is also a lack of participation in the PTA by this population. Getting these families involved is very important.</p>
---	---

**Lori Roetlin**



It has been my observation that our teachers are extremely competent and skilled, despite the amount of segregation that exists between our buildings. It is my observation that our students in ALL of our buildings are given the same high quality instruction, which is something that is not the case in many other districts.

However, as evidenced in the statistics in the Racial Equity report referenced above, despite our extremely competent and hard-working teachers, the educational *experience* is NOT equitable for our Black and Latino students. One example of this is in redistricting proposals and decisions. Our school board has continued to put forward redistricting proposals that place the largest burden on the populations least able to overcome barriers. Our board has continually, over many years, proposed and enacted school boundaries that disproportionately move Black and Latino students far away from their neighborhood schools and far away from the secondary schools that are most accessible to them. Yet, when there are proposals put forward to move white middle class students away from their neighborhood schools, these proposals are almost always very quickly eliminated.

Another situation in which I have observed a difference in the educational experiences between different races or ethnicities in our school buildings is in the number of field trips provided to the students. It has been my observation that far fewer field trips occur in schools that have a larger percentage of Black and Latino students. This is just *one* example of a number of areas in which there are fewer learning opportunities available to the students in some of our schools.

Lastly, it is a fact that some of our schools lack diversity. The educational experience in the schools that lack a significant amount of diversity is inadequate. These children are not being given the benefit of interacting with children who are different from themselves and are ill-prepared for life outside of the walls of their home, neighborhood, and elementary school. They do not get to experience firsthand how to live and interact with others in a culturally responsive way. Cultural responsiveness is not a concept that can be learned only through book study and classroom instruction. Students need to experience diversity *IN* their classroom so that cultural responsiveness can be integrated into their *entire* school experience, from the playground to the lunchroom, to the classroom, etc.

**Megan Schwalm**



I have done a great deal of work with youth in our community and have repeatedly heard concerns from students about the ways that kids of color are treated differently in their school based on race and ethnicity. Members of my campaign youth advisory committee talked about how kids of color, and particularly black girls, are “targeted” at their schools--they discussed how kids of color get disproportionately punished, that kids of color get talked to more harshly, and that kids of color are not held to the same high academic standards as white children. The youth were also acutely aware of the racial imbalance in both behavioral classrooms and honors classes.

Several years ago, I worked with the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson

<p><b>Megan Schwalm</b> <b>cont'd</b></p>	<p>County to begin a young women’s mentoring group. Over and over again, I heard the young women express that there was no one in their schools that they felt safe going to if they had a problem. I believe this directly correlates to lack of diversity among school staff and the concerns mentioned by the students on my campaign youth advisory committee.</p> <p>Furthermore, the facts in the CRJ Racial Equity Report make clear that kids of color are having very different educational experiences in our district than their white counterparts. Again, I believe that this is mostly unintentional but, nonetheless, needs to be a top priority for our new school board. I believe that the district needs to be invested in across-the-board training on cultural competency, privilege, implicit bias, and microaggression. In order to begin addressing complicated issues in a way that is transparent, transformative, and engages stakeholders, the Board will need to engage in difficult conversations. I am skilled at participating in and even facilitating deep, nuanced conversations. As a diversity consultant and trainer, I routinely facilitate discussion about issues that aren’t easy for many folks to discuss. I trust that Iowa City’s educators are ready for this kind of work and I look forward to the opportunity to engage in it as a member of the school board.</p>
---	--

**Lucas Van Orden did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Brianna Wills did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

<p><b>Tom Yates</b></p> 	<p>As I’m the only candidate who has spent any amount of time in classrooms in the district (having taught at City High for 31 years), I’ve seen it first hand. Kids of any race may be excited and eager, or reluctant and sullen. There’s no one set of behaviors in school for kids. I’ve had capable white junior boys who did absolutely nothing in class, and took an F without complaint. I’ve had black students who were recent transfers from Chicago who tried to catch up to the “moving train” of Iowa City education, and simply weren’t prepared. They sometimes disappeared, leaving a “moved back to Chicago” notice from a guidance counselor. I could go on and on, about all sorts of behaviors... The most fights I broke up in my building area were between black girls. White boys generally take their fights off campus and out of the school day. What does that say about either group?</p>
---	---

3. What are strengths and weaknesses (at least one of each) in the ICCSD administration's current Comprehensive Equity Plan Draft?

<p><b>LaTasha DeLoach</b></p>	 <p>Strengths: I believe the strength is that we actually have a plan that has been accepted by the board. It's not a perfect plan, but it is a plan that will start moving us forward.</p> <p>The plan is not perfect because we know that we will need to adjust along the way as we implement the plan. "Equity" can be a moving target sometimes, especially if we do not have metrics in place before we start implementation. More metrics are needed so that we know if we are making improvements.</p> <p>Weaknesses: Improving equity starts and ends with our students. Rather than aim for "multi-cultural" educational components, we need to be implementing <i>culturally-responsive curriculum</i> for all students.</p> <p>For example: Hiring more teachers of color will not necessarily decrease the disparate experiences of students of color. The idea that people of color can come in and single-handedly solve these issues is fundamentally flawed. And what message does that send to our white teachers and staff? If we really want to start making true change in our district, we need to implement multilayered and multi-tiered actions that recognize 1) that everyone benefits from equity and 2) that equity is everyone's responsibility.</p>
<p><b>Shawn Eyestone</b></p>	 <p>I think the biggest strength is that it is recognizing that there is an inequality in current practice. The four specific objectives cover many aspects that our district is currently struggling with. Minority staff, community engagement/awareness, disproportionalities as seen by protected classes, and multicultural and gender fair curriculum. Any one of these areas being improved upon would be a plus, but all four areas being specifically addressed is a strength.</p> <p>The third objective regarding disproportionalities would be better served broken up into more specific categories. While all of the categories may be influenced by some of the same things, ie. Implicit bias, there are all significant differences in contributing factors between graduation rates, course enrollments and Special Education designations.</p>
<p><b>Todd Fanning did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	

**Phil Hemingway**



The study sets ambitious and laudable goals to increase the diversity in new hiring of district employees, support staff and administrators by 2020 and to remove barriers to minority applicants and eliminating them where possible. Those are strengths. However, the plan lacks detail, and the administration has a poor track record for reaching its equity goals. When it does seek community input from diverse voices, those voices seem to fall on deaf ears and are disregarded. An exception might be the decision of the board to extend bussing services to the students from Alexander Elementary. That is a good first step, but one step does not equate to a marathon.

**Jason Lewis**



The strength of the plan is in its scope. The district has done a commendable job of identifying areas of need and steps for closing those gaps. They've created a timetable for this to happen. All of this seems reasonable, but the challenge will be in carrying out the mission. Director Kirschling was correct when he identified the bussing crisis of the Alexander students and families as a moment when this plan could be implemented. It is imperative that we have leaders on the board and in the administration who can continue to identify these shortfalls and address them using the plan as a guide.

Where the plan falls short is in the scope of the team tasked with carrying it out. It will take every person in our community making good faith efforts to right wrongs to make this plan a reality and unfortunately I fear too much of the weight is placed on the shoulders of the Director of Equity in this plan. I'm concerned that placing too much of the responsibility in one place will not give the plans goals the opportunity to become systemic. Equity is a systemic issue and should be horizontally integrated, not vertically. I would like to see more of a role played by the superintendent, and other key players in the administration. As it stands, it seems many other high level administrators are insulated from carrying out this plan. The plan strikes me as one of fulfillment and box-checking, rather than of leadership and advocacy by those in leadership positions. I'd like to see the board be slotted into leadership roles in the plan. Yes, the board is not expected to be part of the day-to-day workings of the district, but the board members are the elected representatives of the community. I'd like to see board member expectations reflected here. The board should play a more active role in interfacing with the community. The equity plan is one area where this role can be codified.

Also, the role of the municipal governments and community representatives is not as robust as it should be. We faces equity challenges throughout our communities, not just in the school district and we should engage our civic leaders in a comprehensive equity plan for our whole community, not just the schools.

**Chris Liebig**



I like the Equity Plan and think it has a lot of strengths. I like the commitment to trying to recruit and hire more minority staff; it's not right, when we have so many minority students, that so few of the people in positions of authority over them are minorities themselves. It not only deprives minority kids of role models, it also teaches some bad lessons about authority and power and its relationship to race and ethnicity. I'd also single out the Plan's focus on reducing disproportionality in discipline (see question 1, above).

I see the Plan as a great starting point for a process that mainly just needs to start. I'm reluctant to criticize it because I think it needs some time to be put into practice before we can see what's working and what needs more work.

But if I have to identify a weakness, I guess I'd say that I have at least some reservations about some of the planned assessment and evaluation of the district's success in reducing disproportionality. For example, I'd be concerned if the assessment of academic achievement rests too much on standardized test scores, advanced course placements, and graduation rates, because it's possible to raise all of those things in ways that are not academically sound. The goal, for example, shouldn't just be to put more minority kids in Advanced Placement courses, regardless of whether that placement fits the student; the goal should always be to find the right way to treat each individual child. There's no perfect way to assess progress in these areas, but when it comes to academic achievement, for example, I might suggest using college graduation rates as one measure, since that's an indicator that the district is much less able to fudge, consciously or unconsciously.

(I don't mean to say that college must be the goal of every student—just that if there were true societal equity, we wouldn't see racial disparities in college graduation, so college graduation rates could be one indicator of whether we're moving toward equity. Successful completion rates of post-secondary vocational or technical programs could be another useful indicator.)

**Brian Richman did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Paul Roesler**



The biggest strength is that the plan separately mentions four different areas that need addressed and doesn't attempt to lump them together as one with only one measurable outcome. Each area is important to the success of achieving equity. Of the four I think that we have made the greatest strides in breaking down the disproportionate number of minorities assigned to special education as well as the disproportionate number of minorities being disciplined. Carmen Dixon and Superintendent Murley have worked to correct the problem that was in place before they were in their current roles and I think you can see the numbers are going down. I am excited to see the district, the police departments and the justice system working together to help this problem. Gabe Cook taking over the reigns of the juvenile relations/crimes detective in the police department in Iowa City is a good thing for students. Gabe is the husband of a school administrator and he understands the importance working with kids first before disciplining

<p><b>Paul Roesler cont'd</b></p>	<p>them. The weakness in the plan is that it has a plan, a timeline, who is responsible and evidence of success but no plan for action if the success isn't achieved. Measurable results are great but what's the next step if the results aren't what we are looking for? Is someone held accountable, do we extend the timeline, do we come up with a new plan?</p>
<p><b>Lori Roetlin</b></p> 	<p>A strength is that it includes multiple objectives, each of which address equity in a different way. Included in the objectives are action steps. A weakness is that it doesn't include detailed information on evaluation tools. More specifics are needed on how data will be gathered to tell us whether or not we are experiencing success in each objective.</p> <p>Although it is addressed in the Comprehensive Equity Plan, an area that I believe needs even <i>greater</i> focus than what it is given is in regards to diversifying the curriculum and materials. For example, look at the types of literature that are being taught. Who are the authors? What is the cultural point of view of the works our kids are reading? This applies at all grade levels, from preschool to high school. Some kids have no cultural context for the activities they are asked to do or the materials they are meant to interpret. Without instruction on cultural context that starts from the very beginning of their education, this important lesson will not become ingrained in their point of view. We are doing our kids a disservice if their take-away lesson is that cultural context is a concept that only applies in certain assignments instead of a concept that shapes one's entire worldview.</p>
<p><b>Megan Schwalm</b></p> 	<p>The greatest strength of the Equity plan is its identification of measurable outcomes and responsible parties: The comprehensive equity plan is a great start--not only does it declare our priorities and commitments along with programmatic responses, but it lets everyone know who in the district is overseeing the implementation of strategies and how we will be measuring success.</p> <p>My caution about the Equity Plan is that the key will be implementation. Getting to where we are now with stated goals and strategies is a huge effort that the Board, the staff, and the community should be proud of. But the ultimate success is measured in how well we carry out the strategies. It's critical that everyone in the district embrace the goals of the equity plan and help with implementation. This is not the work of one or two administrators alone -- everyone at the central office, in the schools, and throughout the community needs to be engaged in order to meet our goals. While the Equity Plan identifies responsible parties, we probably need to be more inclusive in who we identify. We also need to expand on the measures of impact, which I will be interested in supporting if elected to the school board.</p>
<p><b>Lucas Van Orden did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	
<p><b>Brianna Wills did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	

**Tom Yates**



A strength of the plan is that it is broad in its scope. That is also a weakness. There are some specifics in there about strengthening knowledge areas about our diverse students, and (I hope) letting those students participate in developing those areas, and about recruitment (see next question), but it's a bit too broad for my taste. I've been reading "plans" from the district for 35 years. Follow-through is a problem for this district.

4. 38% of students enrolled in ICCSD for 2013-2014 were children of color or mixed-race ([source](#)) in contrast to only 7% of district employees in the same years (4% of teachers, 10% of support staff and 0% of administrators; [source](#)). If you believe this needs to change, what do you propose the school district do to recruit, hire, and retain people of color to fill teaching, staff and administrative positions?

<p><b>LaTasha DeLoach</b></p> 	<p>Yes, this needs improvement. Through the demographics of our teachers and administrators, we send a signal to our children about who can be an authority figure and who cannot. A lack of teachers and administrators who look like them limits what our children of color can aspire to. Is it a coincidence that we can find in many professional fields where men and women of color are underrepresented?</p> <p>We also need to prepare our current teachers and staff by ensuring they have implicit bias training and opportunities for skill development. (This might take the forms of teacher discussion circles, guided study of articles, participation in state and local discussions about disparities that impact children and families of color.) As a board, we have an opportunity to connect with others statewide who are seeing many of our same trends, to share techniques, tools, and successful strategies.</p> <p>One way we as board members can work to address the underrepresentation of staff of color is to be clear with administration about our goals to decrease this gap. We need to ensure that we collect information about why people of color chose to apply to our district, their experience with the process, their decision to take the job. We need to ask current employees what would make them leave and what will help them stay. We can also work with other employers, private and public, as most organizations are struggling with same issue. In many ways, if we pull together, we can create a more welcoming community for professionals of color.</p>
<p><b>Shawn Eyestone</b></p> 	<p>While I understand the value of the exit interview, I think at that point it is too late. You are gaining feedback from someone who has already decided to leave. At work, I use the “stay interview” approach. I ask questions of my staff to determine what makes them continue to work here. What one thing if it changed would make you consider leaving? If you are already thinking of leaving, what one thing can we change to make you want to stay? We take those ideas seriously and try to affect the changes needed to keep the quality staff employed. That works to increase engagement and retention. It also makes attracting new hires easier when you can show a commitment to listening to your staff and addressing their specific needs. I really like the idea from the Comprehensive Equity Plan of “grow your own”. If we can show from the top down a commitment to making our community and therefore our district a welcoming and quality place to work and live, we can tap into our local students as potential future hires.</p>

**Todd Fanning did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Phil Hemingway**



For one thing, my daughter was one of the 38% when she was enrolled in the district. As one insightful educator stated that if children are instructed in a non-diverse context, they are being miseducated. All children deserve educators with diversity and that includes race ethnicity and a mix of cultural backgrounds. This in turn will help them become more tolerant of others, help them aspire to greater things and to learn how to function in an increasingly diverse marketplace.

We *can* do better finding quality applicants of diverse backgrounds. We must continue to recruit candidates that are representative of our schools' population and that are inspiring and inspired. We should be able to do this because the ICCSD is a destination district in the state of Iowa. Of equal importance, the district must ensure that these applicants have a real opportunity for promotion and advancement because we don't want to be seen as merely a launching pad for better teaching jobs elsewhere. We have to stop our "Farm club" mentality and we should encourage those who aren't "homegrown" by providing an obstacle free path to ascend to greater heights.

**Jason Lewis**



There have been strides made in this area, but we need to get to the point where the diversity of our district is reflected in the makeup of its leadership. We need more people of color in the main administration building. We need more people of color in the classrooms and in the administrative offices. To do this we have to continue to seek out applicants who reflect our district make up and be aggressive in hiring and retaining those employees.

We need to engage the community in making it possible for families to come here and grow and not be isolated and marginalized. We need to address policing and civic practices as well as shortfalls in our schools. We live in a culture of distrust of the "other." But the people of color in our communities are not the "other", they are our neighbors. They should be seen as valued partners in building a stronger community and not as a "problem" to be "solved."

We need our school district to look like our community in the makeup of its employees as well as its students and families. We can't continue to live in fear. We must have brave, difficult conversations and take meaningful action. We need to elect leaders ready to push those topics to the fore and shine a light. Outside our classrooms we need to engage civic leaders to create affordable housing, business and leadership opportunities, as well as an atmosphere of inclusion. Isolation is the enemy of that success and the school district can't do the job alone, but our board member can be leaders. We should demand it of them.

**Chris Liebig**



I do believe this needs to change, but this is one question where I think the best answer is to defer to the people we've hired to work on this issue and give them a chance to do what we hired them to do. The action steps toward that goal in the plan seem well thought out, and I'm reluctant to think that I know any better than the people who developed the plan before we've even given it a chance.

**Brian Richman did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Paul Roesler**



One of the biggest things that I think we can do is figure out how we can grow our own within the district. We have many teachers in the district that are products of this district but very few are of color. If we can identify early on which people are interested in pursuing education as a career you could help to make sure that the classes they need to take are being taken. Guidance Counselors can assist in filling out college applications and filing for financial assistance if needed. Once the student moves onto college we should have a plan in place to stay in contact with those individuals to track their progress. As the student moves through college and graduates we should be actively pursuing those students for the open positions that we have. Once the person has been hired into the system we should have a plan in place to also help them further their education so that they can either move up to administrative roles or continue onto different lanes in the pay scale that will help them earn more. Having a support staff that teachers of color can lean on would also help to retain the staff that is in place and help them succeed in their profession. We should also look to recruit from the outside of our district but being able to get people of color to succeed from within our own district may help to retain those teachers and they will be examples for students in their classes to become the next ones in line for teaching and administrative roles here.

**Lori Roetlin**



There are multiple things that can be done, many of which are outlined in the Comprehensive Equity Plan. First, recruitment of people of color needs to be extended to areas that are outside of our local area. I would like to see us work harder to collaborate with career offices in colleges where a greater percentage of the graduates are persons of color. We can also work with our own School of Education at the University of Iowa; however, the number of education students of color at the U of Iowa is low, so we need to have a wider reach. We need a greater critical mass of employees that are persons of color to improve the retention. We also need to develop mentoring relationships between our staff persons of color so that they are feel more connected. I strongly support the "Grow your own" idea as well. One tool that we can use to implement this idea is to encourage a greater number of students of color to take classes at the Kirkwood Regional Center. This is a

<p><b>Lori Roetlin</b> <b>cont'd</b></p>	<p>tremendous resource not only to give our students a jump start on college credits at no cost to them, but it also gives students an opportunity to try out different areas of study (including education).</p>
--	---

<p><b>Megan Schwalm</b></p> 	<p>We absolutely need to address the lack of diversity among staff and administration in our district. While white teachers certainly are capable of serving students of color, having teachers, staff, and administrators who reflect the population of their classrooms is critical. As a public institution, our district workforce needs to reflect the communities it serves. Further, research shows that increasing the number of teachers of color in classrooms is directly correlated to closing the achievement gap and the retention of students of color. The research demonstrates that students of color tend to have higher academic, personal, and social performance when taught by teachers from their own ethnic group. Teachers of color tend to have high performance expectations for students of color. These teachers also serve as emotional and social role models for students who share similar racial and ethnic identities. Furthermore, teachers, staff, and administrators of color can serve as “cultural brokers” who help students and their families better navigate their school environment and culture. It is also important that students are exposed to educators who look like them, share similar cultural experiences, and can serve as role models--my own son came home from preschool last year and announced that he cannot be a teacher when he grows up because brown people are not teachers. It’s hard for kids to believe that they can become that which they do not see.</p> <p>Thus, increasing the diversity among our workforce will serve to decrease the achievement gap in our district.</p> <p>It is not just important for kids of color to see a diverse workforce in our district, white children greatly benefit from seeing teachers, staff, and administrators of color as well. Exposing students to diversity allows them to see and experience Black/Latin@/etc. competence, it provides them with a more nuanced portrayal of the world, and helps deepen their cultural understanding. Being exposed to diversity helps prepare our students to be citizens of a multicultural society. Having a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse workforce helps to provide students with multiple perspectives that allows them to gain a greater understanding of the world around them.</p> <p>I believe that our district is moving in a positive direction with regards to the recruitment of a more diverse workforce. As other local municipalities are also working to increase the diversity of their workforce, this is a prime opportunity for our district to partner and work to create systemic change in our community. That said, I feel we need to put greater effort into the <i>retention</i> of diverse staff and administrators. As we know from the data, recruitment is only the first (and easiest) piece of increasing the diversity of districts. Retention is the greatest challenge.</p>
---	---

<p><b>Lucas Van Orden did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	
---	--

**Brianna Wills did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Tom Yates**



I first spoke to this question about ten years ago at a board meeting—it has not just popped up! The foremost problem I see with recruitment is **incentive**. Why should a minority teacher want to move to Iowa City? We pay well for Iowa, but Iowa doesn't pay well as far as U.S. salaries go There are other cultural factors as well that may or may not be a draw to Iowa City... We need a "Grow Our Own" **action** plan to encourage our best minority students to attend college as education students, give them scholarships, and then give them jobs when they finish. Chicago was doing this years ago; I don't know if there is a plan in practice nowadays in the Chicago metro area. "Grow Our Own" is mentioned in the district plan, but is there an **action plan** there?... Connected to this, also, is the lack of commitment of the U of I College of Education to help Iowa City out with minority teacher development. (I have a lot to say about the non-relationship of the College of Ed. with the school district.)

5. Why should people who are committed to racial justice support your candidacy specifically?

<p><b>LaTasha DeLoach</b></p> 	<p>I have committed my life to working on racial and social justice issues since I was a Black teen growing up in Iowa. I know firsthand the harm that racial injustice can do to a family and youth in particular. I also know firsthand the resiliency and supportive families that help our youth to survive.</p> <p>I am aware of the racial disparities that our school district is facing, and I am well-informed about the work to change racial disparities within school districts that is happening nationwide. As the Johnson County Disproportionate Minority Contact Coordinator, I see how the school-to-prison pipeline works and I lead efforts to dismantle it.</p>
<p><b>Shawn Eyestone</b></p> 	<p>I can't personally say that I know what it is like to live in our society as a person of color. I can tell you what it is like to be placed into a category and have that follow you around. I can also tell you what it is like to have that stigma removed. My parents divorced when I was an infant. My mom raised me and my sister alone for the first four years of my life before she remarried. Even after that, we were poor and attended a school with a pretty good mix of diversity of both race and economic status. I felt out of place many times because of my handmade clothes or my special colored lunch ticket. I was bullied. I felt the overwhelming presence of the haves vs. the have nots. This was true through Jr. High. In High School, I found singing in the choir and running Cross Country and Track. I felt like I belonged for the first time. I was finally being recognized as the individual I was and the talents that I had over anything else. I would hope that we can create that environment for all of our kids long before high school rolls around.</p> <p>On a more professional note, I have had the opportunity to be a hiring manager outside of this area. I lived in northern California for four years after college. My candidate pool was very different than what I have experienced here in Iowa. Primarily, I had applicants from Vietnam or the Philippines. To be honest, it was a bit of a culture shock to me and I was initially uncomfortable at first. We had language barriers as well as a lack of work experience. What I quickly learned was that everyone just wanted to be given a chance to prove themselves. And they did just that. It was an eye opening experience that I needed and have appreciated greatly since.</p>
<p><b>Todd Fanning did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire</b></p>	

**Phil Hemingway**



My blessed life in an extended mixed race family has opened my heart and my eyes to the importance and the gift of inclusion, as well as a commitment to the whole human community. I was born in rural Johnson County, went to West Branch Schools K-12 and had little exposure or interaction with people of other races and cultures. That all changed when I began meeting graduate students who were working with my great uncle who was a professor emeritus in the Zoology Department. My real life changing experience occurred when I was hired to manage Roy Carver's ranch in Belize, Central America. I spent five years as a General Manager of Carver Tropical Products and employees came from many different countries, including Belize, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras. Not only did I have to work with a different language, I was immersed in different cultures, traditions, and ways of doing things. I had the time of my life in Belize, and met my lovely wife Anita there. The gift of parenthood and our wondrous daughter cultivated in me a sense of commitment to the wellbeing of every child in this community. I have also benefited from the great experience of working with diverse people and personalities in the former Soviet Union and Africa, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania and Angola. Working with local stevedores in all these countries gave me insight into the lives of others that few get to see. I strive to be a fair and honest man and cognizant of my own weaknesses and shortcomings. I will do all within my power to ensure that every student in the Iowa City Community School District will feel treasured, empowered, respected and welcomed. I believe there is no greater responsibility of a community than to provide for the education of its students. We are preparing the future leaders and members of our increasingly diverse community. We all have a stake in their success and will be judged by their accomplishments.

**Jason Lewis**



I have been a strong and consistent advocate for Mark Twain Elementary and other schools with diverse populations. My daughter has a 504 plan and my son has an IEP, and while this is not directly comparable to living as members of a protected class, we know the challenges of working within the school district bureaucracy and fighting for the needs of our children. I want to bring that fighting spirit to bear for all students and families who face barriers in our community.

My wife and I are foster parents and constant advocates for youth in our area. My candidacy has been endorsed by the Iowa City Federation of Labor and I look forward to being a part of the fight for working people, no matter the color of their skin or ethnic background. I was adopted and appreciate the challenges displacement and marginalization place on young people. As a resident of the southeast side of Iowa City, I count people of many races and ethnicities among my neighbors and I will continue to fight for an equitable environment for families of all races, colors, and creeds to build successful futures.

We need passionate, purposeful leaders who are unafraid. I will be one of those leaders for all of us.

**Chris Liebig**



I don't think I'd be approaching these issues with a good frame of mind if I claimed to be an expert on racial justice issues, especially given that I am not myself a member of a racial minority and have not experienced first-hand what life in America as a minority is like. I hope I've shown some sensitivity to and awareness of issues that are related to race, for example in the writing that I've done online.

(In particular, my blog has focused for years on issues about school disciplinary practices and the lessons that schools teach by the way they assert authority over the kids, and on the need to make sure that our school system treats kids humanely and as individuals who need to develop not just job skills but the ability to participate capably in democratic self-government—issues that are not exclusively about race but certainly have racial dimensions. I don't mean to suggest that my blogging has changed the world, just that it can give you a good idea of where I'm coming from.)

My approach to issues involving race would be to seek out the people who know more than I do and to take my understanding of their needs from what they tell me rather than from my own preconceptions.

**Brian Richman did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Paul Roesler**



I am committed to making sure that we continue on the path of equity in our district. My wife as taught at Mark Twain Elementary since 2003 and I have been fortunate enough to see through her experiences that kids succeed regardless of color when the barriers to their success are removed. We need continue to support teachers and administrators in furthering their education as teachers and provide them with the knowledge and tools to help kids succeed. We need diverse schools that aren't segregated. We need to be looking to add programs instead of cutting them especially those programs that are beneficial to all kids not just kids who can afford to participate and have the means to participate. My personal beliefs align with all of those goals and as a board member I will continue to help remove the barriers that are stand in front of our students.

**Lori Roetlin**



As a social worker, I have a heart for racial justice and an awareness of how systemic and unintentional cultural bias can impact a person's ability to be successful. I have also witnessed racial prejudice on a deeply personal level. My first husband was a person of color and one of my children is mixed-race. I have witnessed the prejudice that was directed at my husband in many aspects of his life and I have seen the impact that prejudice has on a person's self-esteem, their choices in life, and their lack of equal access to opportunities. To a lesser degree, I also experienced the prejudice of those who don't approve of interracial marriage. When the people that you love the most experience prejudice, it has a profound impact on your worldview and deepens your empathy and understanding.

**Megan Schwalm**



I have a long track record of working actively in the Iowa City community for racial justice. I am the former co-chair of Iowa City’s Coalition for Racial Justice and served on the Board of Directors for the Dream Center. Along with the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County, I developed a young women’s support group, which grew into a mentoring program with the Women’s Resource and Action Center. I spearheaded the Million Hoodie March in 2012, which was a large-scale community rally addressing issues of racial profiling. In addition, I facilitate sessions at national conferences, camps, and retreats about transracial parenting through adoption, which focuses on issues such as building community, white privilege, and bystander interventions.

I believe that Black Lives Matter. I have been active in the Center for Worker Justice’s campaigns and have learned so much from leaders in our immigrant communities. I was thrilled when scores of families of color showed up at the school board meeting and made the case -- successfully! -- for funding for transitional busing. I have worked for years to ensure the interests and the voices of people of color in our community are sought out and listened to-- will continue to do so as a member of the school board.

**Lucas Van Orden did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Brianna Wills did not answer the Coalition for Racial Justice questionnaire**

**Tom Yates**



I’ve lived in Iowa City for almost 50 years, attended Southeast and City as students, and taught here. I’ve seen the changes first hand in the schools, and know the challenges as a teacher. We need to both keep up a “Dialogue of Diversity” in the community, but also DO something. Kids in trouble in school need help NOW, and I hope to be able to be part of their success.

May I add a couple of more things? You don’t have to publish them, but I would appreciate your reading them.

1) School—any school—is a **culture** in itself. For any student to do well in school, he or she has to **commit to the culture**. Not all aspects of school are positive—we all know that. But students and parents who have not had good experiences with school are not inclined to commit. And no commitment equals no success. This doesn’t mean that a school should ignore student diversity. Studies show that diverse, **healthy** school environments raise the success level of all students. But we have to convince students to commit, and that is our collective responsibility.

2) We need to quit “soft-peddling” education. Kids who need extra help, need extra help, and they should get it. But education is a process, and it’s work.

The following is a statement by Stanley Crouch. If you don’t know his work, he’s a poet, essayist, and jazz critic. He was born in a poor area of Los Angeles, the son of a drug-addicted criminal and a domestic worker. He says he broke out of the environment he grew up in because his public school teachers took no excuses:

<p><b>Tom Yates</b> <b>cont'd</b></p>	<p><i>These people were on a mission. They had a perfect philosophy: you WILL learn.</i></p> <p><i>If you came in there and said, "I'm from a dysfunctional family and a single-parent household," they would say, "Boy, I am going to ask you again. What is eight times eight?"</i></p> <p><i>When I was growing up, there were no excuses except your house burned down or there was a murder in the family. Eight times eight was going to be sixty-four whether your family was dysfunctional or not. It's something you needed to know!</i></p> <p><i>(New York Times, 8/29/93)</i></p> <p>I typed this up in big print and posted it on the bulletin board I used to keep above the desk in my office (when I had office space...). It reminded me to stay focused on the mission: Teaching is for student learning; learning is for knowledge; knowledge is power. I still believe that.</p>
---	--