

Name: Joyce Easter Fitch

Office sought: 102 Elementary Board of Education

Previous political experience: 2 terms on the District 102 Board of Education

Previous community involvement:

Lifelong resident of District 102
Teacher in District 102
Administrator, Director of Technology, in 102
Two terms on the 102 Board of Education
Director of the Nettie McKinnon Art Gallery

Education:

Knox College – BA English, French Secondary Education
National Louis University – MS Educational Technology
University of Chicago – Cognition and Communication

Occupation: Educational Consultant

Why do you want to be a school board member?

In the 2 terms I have been on the board of education, we have been able to accomplish a great deal by re-allocating resources, sometimes even saving money. I would like to help a new board accomplish even more while staying within our financial means.

A few of our accomplishments were starting a full day kindergarten, programs for pre-school, talent development, autism, closing the minority achievement gap, a robust summer school; we added a bussing program, and put in place a cost savings of over \$2.5 million annually.

I am unique in that I have a great deal of educational expertise and also knowledge of the workings of school districts in general and particularly district 102. I have experienced several referendums in 102, and I have been a part of strategic planning in the past.

After the election, we will have 3 board members who have been on the board for 2 years and we could have 3 members who have never been on the board. A new superintendent is starting in July, and the initiatives we address will include strategic planning, a hard look at finances, legislative mandates, and new and energized focus on communication.

Having been a lifelong resident of District 102, I see the diversity of the 102 community as an asset. I was a teacher at Cossitt and Park, so I understand the importance of programs we put in place to meet our diverse student population's needs, and the need for

good training for our staff. As Director of Technology in District 102, I obtained a good knowledge of the complex funding for our schools. This has given me insight into the importance of working to obtain funding other than just from the taxpayers. My 2 terms on the Board of Education provided insight into the entire operation district.

How many school board meetings have you attended in the past year? 24 board meetings, 10 superintendent search meetings, 36 teacher negotiation meetings

What is the most important issue facing the next school board, and what should the solution be?

The important issues facing the school board are many and interwoven. One of these issues is the legislature's impact on education. The legislature mandates programs and does not fund them, which creates financial issues, and also impacts our student learning. We need to focus on working with our legislators so they will support us. For example, Common Core and PARCC are unfunded mandates. For this first year of implementation, students will miss hours of instruction to take the test, teachers spent hours in training to get ready, and the tests were done on computers with no funding from the state for the technology or training.

Educational legislation is growing. The legislature could possibly be handing over debt incurred by pensions. This expense is the state's responsibility, but the state did not keep up their payments in spite of the law to do so. If this debt, or even part of it, is sent back to the schools to pay, it will greatly and negatively impact the budget. That is not an expense we can afford nor is it an expense our taxpayers should incur. Another example is SB16 which re-allocates funds to schools and would remove 2.6 million dollars from District 102.

We need to have an open and constant dialog with our legislators who need to be accountable for these educational funding issues. The Board of Education is a part of an advocacy group that monitors and influences suburban policy in Springfield, ED-Red. I think we have constituents who will join the Board of Education and Ed Red to fight for the resources we need for our students.

If elected, what changes would you like to have accomplished by the end of your term?

- Programs in place to increase academic performance for all students
- Communication that is a constant and relevant dialog with all stakeholders .
- A completed successful strategic plan to help us stay focused and working together on priorities.
- A debt-free balanced budget and a plan to remain living within our means.
- A working relationship with our legislators to support us in Springfield.

If elected, what changes would you most strongly resist?

I would resist adding items that increase our expenses. If an expense is needed, I would support removing one expense and replacing it with whatever is needed. The district and our constituents cannot afford to spend more money. Together, we need to make hard choices.

The educators bring good rationale to the school board for whatever changes they need. I ask that follow-up assessment be planned to show how changes are working.

What other issues facing the school district are of interest to you? Why?

We need to engage in strategic planning for several reasons. One reason is that we have not been able to communicate and collaborate with stakeholders as effectively as we would like, and strategic planning will bring many stakeholders together to collaborate. Another reason is that education has many initiatives, mandated and non-mandated, but there is only so much time to work with these. We need the focus of strategic planning to keep us working together on the same initiatives instead of attempting to do too much at one time.

Knowing that better communication has been a focus for the board, I have taken a course offered by the Illinois Board of Education about how to engage the community. I recently shared this information at a board meeting and I think we can use these new ideas to move more quickly on this initiative. We can use these within our existing parent/community committees of Parent Advisory, Financial Advisory, and I would like to add a Legislation Awareness group to the list. And we can use these strategies with all of our constituents to broaden our knowledge of their thoughts, and their understanding of what we are doing.

We have many programs in place to meet the needs of our students, but the data we have received shows some students need something else to move them forward academically at a faster pace. This needs immediate attention.

We are currently in deficit spending. All signs point to the need for a referendum, but I would like us to look carefully and with a new eye to what we can do to save money. I am sure the new superintendent, who has a record of dealing with difficult financial situations, will take a hard look at finances with the board. If we do need to move forward with a referendum, we will need to engage the staff and community to determine what priorities are for educating 102 students. These will be tough discussions and decisions, but the board cannot make these decisions on its own.