



Albuquerque Public Schools Questionnaire for Board of Education Candidates

Date: **January 2011**

Name: **Marty R. Esquivel**

Length of Residency in School District: **29 years**

Occupation: **Attorney, Narvaez Law Firm**

Do you currently hold other public office? **Yes; APS Board, District 4**

Are you available to attend Board meetings the first and third Wednesday nights of the month at 5 p.m.? **Yes**

Additionally, there are four board committees that meet twice a month at 7:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. or 5 p.m. Are you available to attend committee meetings? **Yes**

Periodically, the Board must meet during daytime hours for Board meetings, budget hearings, and luncheons. Are you available during daytime hours for these activities? **Yes**

In addition to regularly scheduled meetings, the Board requires approximately 10 hours a week in reading, researching, miscellaneous meetings, school visits, telephone calls, and e-mail correspondence. Can your schedule accommodate the extra time involved in serving as a Board member? **Yes**

Experience

1. Why do you want to be a board member for Albuquerque Public Schools?

I think we share concerns about District 4 schools and I've worked hard to voice those issues, particularly as they relate to student achievement. Let's face it: At the end of the day, that's what we're all most concerned about. I'm happy to say that the district has improved its graduation rate in the past four years and I'm confident that trend will continue. But bridging the achievement gap in our schools – particularly in our district – is of the utmost importance to me. In my current post as board president, I've pushed the administration to create common-sense standards that will improve the learning potential for our struggling students.

Like you, I believe in accountability. But I doubt that arbitrary, No Child Left Behind statistics alone really determine the quality of a school. It's so much more complicated than that because children aren't some algorithm. You can't tell me that Montezuma Elementary or Jefferson Middle School of Highland High, to name just a few, can be evaluated solely on numbers dreamed up in a bureaucrat's office. That's demeaning to teachers and principals. Worse, it gives children too little credit for how much they're improving.

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I think we can honor teachers and help them in the classroom by battling for them at budget time. As we enter perhaps the most difficult budgetary era in APS history, you have my word that I'll fight hard to keep cuts away from teachers. I've frustrated many APS administrators who thought OK or adequate was good enough. I'll continue that work in a second term from District 4.

Another fight I'll continue is the move to bring money back to District 4 in the form of new buildings on our historic, but aging campuses. There was a time when APS needed to build new schools for growing areas, but it's time to re-direct our energies on our core schools. In just the past few years you've seen gorgeous improvements to Highland and Albuquerque high schools, Jefferson Middle School, Bandalier Elementary, and a revamped, re-opened Coronado Elementary. But that's just the start, and in a few years I believe you'll see even better facilities that will do our kids proud.

There are plenty of things we can talk about: helping teachers, improving our kids' performance; investment in District 4; school choice. And as this campaign continues, I hope we'll get that opportunity. A parent's voice – your voice – needs to be heard, more than any special interest groups or those with hidden agendas that may not have anything to do with day-to-day, classroom-to-classroom realities of our schools.

I know where you're coming from. I'm there, too. I have two daughters at Albuquerque high and a son at Zia Elementary School. I take nothing more seriously than making sure they're well-educated because I know what a great public school education did for me. It's why I ran for the board in the first place, and it's why I'd be grateful to return.

2. What is your interest in education?

A successful public education system is the most valuable resource we can provide to our community. I come from a family, including my wife's family, that believe in public education as a vehicle to better yourself and your community. While it is not a perfect institution, it is a foundation that has allowed our society to better itself in many different ways.

Personally, my philosophy on public education is that a collaborative approach by all stakeholders is key to the success of educating our children. I believe teachers, parents and children must be heard and their opinions regarded with the highest degree of respect. We must also have an environment which encourages our parents to be involved in the classroom.

3. How would you support the mission of the district?

We all should prioritize the achievement gap, graduation rates and teacher appreciation as our top goals. However, in seeking that vision, I believe we need to prioritize the following principles as our guidance:

A. An Environment of Collaboration – We must create an environment in which voices are heard from the classroom, from teachers, from staff, from parents and from principals. Too often in a centralized-management scenario, directives and philosophies become too top-down without critical voices being heard. A productive School Board should serve as a check and balance for our superintendent to be inclusive regarding the operation of our schools and classrooms. While I believe Winston Brooks generally does value the opinions of teachers, it is important that someone like me makes sure he understands the need to work with everyone.

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B. Classroom Innovation – We must encourage teaching and learning that respects traditional curriculum, but also impassions the ability to find newer and better ways to teach at a time when our technology continues to grow exponentially. Use of the promethean boards has opened new doors for methods of teaching over the last four years, but teachers need to be properly trained on them to get the most we can in terms of educating our children. I believe we need to prioritize teacher training and enrichment, and reject any attempts to cut back on these efforts when it comes time to starting trimming our budget.

C. Fighting for Proper Funding – We have been on our heels for quite some time. We know that the outlook for revenue is bleak, and we face some of the most severe cuts in a generation. Collectively, and not individually, we must come together and advocate for public education as effectively as we can. We must be smart in our approach. We need to come to the table as problem-solvers, and not allow any of us to be portrayed as complainers. I am most ready to take on this challenge with the help of our parents, students and children.

Demands are being placed on our schools to increase performance at a time when resources are being severely reduced. Our citizenry needs to know this reality and demand that our legislators make public education the priority it needs to be during these tough economic times.

4. What is your past and current involvement with Albuquerque Public Schools?

Over the past four years, I have served on the Board of education. I was elected unanimously by my peers over the last two years to serve as Board President. Prior to that, I served as President of the Zia Elementary School PTA and a member of the Zia PTA since 1999. I have also been a very active parent at Jefferson Middle School and Albuquerque High School where both daughters attended.

5. What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of Albuquerque Public Schools?

APS has demonstrated some marked improvement over the last four years. It is, however, important to note that there is substantial room for improvement during these times. We must recognize those things APS is doing well and identify areas in which there needs to be demonstrative improvement.

Strengths:

1. Our graduation rates are approaching 70% which is an all time high. This is a major success that has unfortunately floated underneath the radar. It was achieved, in part, by a Board charge that demanded the Administration set some goals and set out a plan to achieve these goals.

2. Community Outreach. We got out to the community to identify a profile of what we needed in terms of hiring a new superintendent. We then conducted an open, inclusive search for a superintendent that culminated in the selection of Mr. Brooks. After selecting Mr. Brooks, we conducted another 18 community events to identify what should be the goals of the District over the next few years. While some of these events were well attended and some weren't, I believe it demonstrated our desire to want to hear from and include the community in the future direction of the district.

3. Professionalism of the Board. I have worked hard to make the Board a well-functioning, cohesive group of people from across Albuquerque. In doing so, I've made sure we've had

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meetings that respect decorum. In addition, it's been important to avoid bickering and back fighting that has plagued school boards in the past. While we have had some disagreements, the Board has avoided these past problems of pettiness and colloquialism that have caused distress in years past.

4. Protect Classrooms from Budget Cuts. My mantra has always been that our classrooms should be the last to cut. Our Board has always kept that in mind. When we had a surplus, the Board stepped up to lessen the hit of the increased contribution to the ERB fund in 2008. We have been strong advocates of our teachers.

Weaknesses

1. We need to create a better environment where we are listening to our children, parents and teachers. There is often a perception that the operations are too top down and voices are not being heard at the school level.

2. Articulate a vision. We have our sights set on improving achievement, but our community needs to better understand our goals toward making that a reality.

3. Budget Cuts. The general public is generally aware of budget cuts, but they don't appreciate exactly how they are adversely affecting the classroom. Broad claims to cut back on administrative costs are not solutions. Claims that money will only flow into education when our schools produce higher test scores are equally misleading. Our challenge, together, is to clearly articulate the irreparable harm that further cuts will cause public education. In doing so, that mandates that we have a cohesive message and that we come to the table as problem solvers.

4. Socioeconomic Challenges of Our Families. The gap between the rich and the poor seems to be forever widening. We must recognize the effects poverty and other socioeconomic challenges have in terms of academic achievement. Our schools and our teachers can only do so much between the hours our children are attending school. It is our challenge to identify children who come from tough environments to encourage their parents to become more vested in the education of their children. Of course, we need the resources to help them.

6. What is the role of the Board of Education?

By statute the Board of Education has three primary duties: 1) supervision and retention of the Superintendent, 2) approval of the budget and 3) develop educational policy for the District. Inclusive in these three general areas are the inherent responsibilities to make sure the District has a vision and is accountable to its stakeholders. A functional school board will be responsive to the community to make sure the District is committed a responsible operation of our schools and classrooms.

7. What is the role of individual board members?

It is incumbent upon a board member to be responsive to the needs of his District by listening to members of the community regarding the operations of the School District. A School Board member shall also be serious about the need to hold the Administration accountable for moving the district forward – making sure our schools are meeting the needs of children, parents and teachers.

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8. What should be the relationship between the superintendent and Board of Education?

It should be a professional relationship in which expectations are clearly articulated with measurable goals set to assess performance of the District. There must be mutual respect for the duties and responsibilities of both the District and the School Board with clear lines established which recognizes structure and accountability.

9. What unique qualities would you bring to the Board of Education?

I have been the only parent on the Board of Education with children in school the last two years. I have a compelling story of success to tell people about the value of a public education within APS. My story begins with my oldest daughter who is graduation from Albuquerque High School with premier academic credentials and is applying to the best universities across the country. It continues with my middle daughter, a wonderfully kind soul, who is a freshman at AHS and who I need to constantly monitor (through *I-parent*) and encourage to be responsible with her studies. It continues with my youngest, a third-grade boy at Zia Elementary, who has a learning disability and struggles mightily with his reading. My wife, Pauline, and I battle over his homework with him nightly, just like many other parents do. I trust my kids to the system. I'm proud of that fact.

I can tell people that our system of public education has worked well for my children. I can tell them that it's worked because we've been blessed with wonderful schools, caring and dedicated teachers and staff, and because my wife and I have made it a priority to be involved in our kids' education. Success in our schools comes down to many components collaborating and working together respectfully.

And, I can understand the legitimate criticisms. I can understand that sometimes APS falters and we need to improve. While my experience has been excellent, it has not been without a few bumps in the road. I can tell people that those problems can be fixed with good will and respect. I feel that people involved in the profession of public education are good souls who want the best for our children. As long as we can begin from that premise, I think we can address any problem. When I've spoke publicly over the last four years, I've always asked that teachers be appreciated for their hard work and dedication.

I have established a voice in the operation of APS as a Board member, as a parent and as a community leader. I want to continue my service to make sure that my voice of reason continues to be heard and that people know that we are on the right track to improve and protect public education in our state.

10. Other school/community volunteer activities related to the community:

Member and Past President, New Mexico Foundation for Open Government

Past Board Member, PBJ Family Services

Past Board Member, National Hispanic Cultural Center Foundation

Youth Coach, AYSO, AYBL, Lobo Little League

Past Board member, UNM Alumni Association

New Mexico State Bar Association

Member, Albuquerque Bench Bar Media Committee

Past President and Member, Zia Elementary PTA

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11. What are your thoughts about:

a. No Child Left Behind –

Like you, I believe in accountability. But I doubt that arbitrary, No Child Left Behind statistics alone really determine the quality of a school. It's so much more complicated than that because children aren't some algorithm. You can't tell me that Montezuma Elementary or Jefferson Middle School of Highland High, to name just a few, can be evaluated solely on numbers dreamed up in a bureaucrat's office. That's demeaning to teachers and principals. Worse, it gives children too little credit for how much they're improving.

b. Closing the achievement gap –

Addressing the achievement gap has to be a top priority. Our common denominator is that we want much higher achievement in our classroom and the achievement gap continues to be our biggest challenge. The reality we are faced with is less funding to public education at a time when we're being asked to do more. We've taken some steps with extended hours for our high schools, use of promethean boards and a more aggressive plan for our children to read at the proper level by the third grade. But, we need more. We need innovation and better collaboration with our teachers and administration to make our classrooms successful.

c. Parental involvement and community engagement –

Our parents need to feel welcomed in our schools, period. I take this issue personally and seriously. I'll work with the administration to make sure your ideas and concerns are heard at the ground level, where it counts most. We want our parents to feel comfortable in schools, if only because the more they visit, the more likely they'll be able to help their kids.

By my signature, I affirm that I meet all requirements to become a member of the Board of Education.

s/ Martin R. Esquivel

Applicant Signature