

**Name:** Janice M. Williams

**District:** Las Cruces

**Position:** 4

*Please answer the following to the best of your ability within 150 words or less.*

### **1. What is motivating you to run for the school board?**

We must do better to provide a quality education for all students. Our state being ranked as the lowest in educational attainment is not acceptable. As a board member, I want to return confidence to our schools. We can no longer overlook supporting our teachers and administrators with the tools and resources they need to provide all students with the best education possible. I want a clear vision for improvement, a well communicated plan with realistic goals, and an effective method of monitoring whether those goals are achieved.

### **2. What will your priorities be as a school board member?**

\*To encourage community and family involvement to promote interest in education.

\*Have effective support systems for families from all backgrounds to meet the needs of their children.

\*Effective governing and management of funds so resources are provided for the highest and best use.

\*Develop comprehensive policies to increase reading proficiency by third grade.

\*Evaluate our Special Education program to ensure children with special needs are receiving the quality education they deserve.

### **3. What have you done in the past to help your community thrive?**

For 10 years, I was actively involved as a volunteer with the Focus School Partnership Program in Clark County, Nevada. I assisted in building partnerships with community businesses and organizations to provide services, donations and volunteer support for "at-risk" children and families. I additionally founded and spearheaded an Adopt-a-Family program through my workplace, which focused on providing short term relief for families with emergent needs.

### **4. How have you previously advocated for students and educators in your community?**

I mentored a young man that had dropped out of high school and was on the verge of getting involved in drugs. I re-enrolled him in school and encouraged him every step of the way. I attended his Individualized Education Plan meetings and worked with several wonderful teachers and principals to get him caught up in his education. This young man needed to know someone cared about him, and the importance of his education.

Although my experience was advocating for one student, I saw what a life changing event having a mentor was for him. It made a difference. Imagine what we could all do for children by just simply being involved.

**5. How did your educational experiences shape you, and what lessons will you take with you from those experiences?**

I was the first one in my family to attend college. It was also the first time in my life I had ever received an "F" on a test. I was devastated and dropped out after my first semester. I found work instead, and was fortunate to work for a company that had a tuition reimbursement program. I went back to college, with renewed enthusiasm, and motivation to excel. After all, my boss had told me, "The more you learn, the more you earn."

I loved working in study groups. Collaborating on ideas for group papers and presentations. An important part of education involves listening and learning from others. I discovered I was quite adept at coordinating group efforts and focusing people on the subject at hand. This is what I bring to the school board.

**6. Have you ever worked as an employee in public education? If so, how did your school board affect you? What lessons will you take from your experience into this position?**

Although I have not worked directly in public education, shortly after I retired, I drove a school bus for a few years. I love working with children, and it was quite an experience to take them to and from school. I have seen a lot: behavioral issues; poverty issues; bullying issues; discipline problems; and the genuine sweetness of a child wanting to share their latest accomplishment with you.

The lesson is involvement. Pure and simple. Be involved in a student's life in some way. Sometimes the largest impact you can make is in just listening to them.

**7. New Mexico has the lowest high school graduation rate in the nation. What specific steps will you take to address this problem?**

New Mexico has a vulnerable population within our community. The first step I would take in combatting this problem is to establish community education and support programs aimed at helping high school students. I would then develop in-school advocacy programs focused on educating students on the importance of developing their futures. Next, I would take steps to establish long-term mentorship programs. This will help center the students and engage them in society and help them understand the mainstream concepts.

**8. New Mexico ranks 49th in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading and math scores. What specific steps will you take to address this problem?**

Reading skills affect a student's success in every curriculum subject. First, I would do a comprehensive evaluation of our curriculum to determine where we are failing. Are we just implementing grade specific expectations or are we taking into account the specific needs of the students? I would then evaluate the diverse variety of children in a classroom and identify different learning styles and needs based on the student population. Perhaps it's time to not look at the method of teaching, but to look to a strategy that incorporates different learning styles and an individual student's requirements.

**9. How will you advocate for both the students and the employees of the public education system in your role?**

As a board member, I believe my role should be to listen and let the students and employees of the education system know that I am here to listen. Decisions should be made in the best interests of the students, teachers, administration and the public. A board member should be the voice when students and employees don't feel they're being heard.

**10. Think New Mexico, a non-partisan think tank, released a study in 2017 which suggests that the percentage of a state's education budget that makes it to the classroom, as opposed to administrative costs, is related to student performance. Do you agree? Will you advocate for an increased percentage of the budget going to the classroom? Why or why not? If so, how will you address the issue?**

In speaking with many teachers, it was appalling to discover the amount of money our teachers are spending out of their own pockets just to provide basic necessities they need for teaching their students. This should be an easy and obvious decision. As a school board member our main priority must be to make certain funds are applied in the most efficient and effective ways. I would address current fund management to identify wasted spending and reapply those funds to alleviate personal spending.

**11. New Mexico is combating a "teacher shortage." A recent study by NMSU said New Mexico's "teacher attractiveness score"\* is 2.18 on a scale of one to five. What will you do to increase this score and make sure these vacancies are filled by qualified individuals as quickly as possible?**

It is difficult to attract qualified educators to an underperforming school. I feel the first step is offering competitive salaries. Other incentives and benefit packages should be considered as well. Additionally, teacher morale is low, they should feel they have administrative support and opportunity for shared collaboration and decision making.

I have also spoken with several teachers who feel that school assessments and accountability measures do not address local curricula and cultures, and may not be indicative of a teacher's abilities to teach. We need to look at a better assessment model to additionally help the attrition rate.

**12. How can you make your school board an example of excellence for the other boards in the state?**

Keep our focus on doing the best for our children. Set the standards. Set the expectations. Make sure that our decisions and policies are designed to enrich the learning experience and meet the goals of providing a quality education for every child. We must be accountable for providing a great place to learn, a great place to teach and to restore confidence in our community that we can provide the best education.

*\*According to [NMSU](#) "Teacher Attractiveness Score" takes into consideration compensation, working conditions, teacher qualifications, and teacher turnover.*