



Edwardsville | Glen Carbon
Chamber of Commerce

POLICY COUNCIL & BUSINESS BUILDS PAC

ECUSD#7: SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate: John McDole

Position Sought: Four-Year In-Township Seat

1. Please provide us with some basic information. Tell us briefly about:

a. your family: Wife, Karla (Carroll) McDole. Son, Johnny in 4th grade at Woodland Elementary. Daughter, Audrey in 1st grade at Nelson Elementary.

b. how long you've lived in District 7: 42 years. All of my life.

**c. your education: Edwardsville High School; 1996
Bradley University, B.S. Marketing; 2000
SIU Edwardsville, M.B.A. MIS Emphasis; 2004**

**d. your employment: Busey Bank; 2006-Present
VP – Commercial Portfolio Manager
Boeing; 2003-2006
Finance**

2. Why are you seeking this office?

In April of 2019 I had the honor of being elected to a two-year term on the Edwardsville School Board. Along with my role as a board member I have also served on the Finance Committee, Facilities Committee, and Policy Committee for the District. The beginning of the 2019-2020 school year brought new focus on creating Career and Technical Education opportunities for students and enhancing technology within the district, all while continuing to reduce the Education Fund deficit and improve the finances of the district. As the first semester moved forward strategic planning initiatives and an Equity Task Force were implemented to move the district forward. All of these activities were gaining significant momentum until the pandemic hit in March of 2020. In short, there is unfinished business to be completed. We need visionaries who will help build on the positive accomplishments over the last two years while also advocating for students and teachers who need our support more than ever.

In the end, though, my main motivation is the promise that we as a community make to our youth through our school system. A school district's purpose is to provide a nurturing and safe environment to prepare our children for their futures, and it needs to be inclusive, regardless of background or ability.

3. What education, skills and experiences have prepared you to deal with the complex financial, technical and legal issues that regularly come before the school board?

For over the last 14 years , I've worked in various roles at Busey Bank/TheBANK of Edwardsville. For the last year I've worked with commercial customers on their lending needs and helping them grow their businesses, and this comes after a year of facilitating special projects and strategic initiatives for the bank as a whole. Prior to that I spent 12 years as a home mortgage lender, so I dealt with the property taxes of District 7 residents just about every day over that time. I've seen first-hand how property taxes affect the cost of living, the cost of running a business, and I've seen how they affect people's ability to purchase homes in District 7. I've also seen first-hand that because of the quality of our schools there is higher than normal demand to live in our communities, which also results in growth and development. There is a balance to this, and I believe I have the knowledge and experience to see the big picture when it comes to property taxes—both in how they fund schools and how they affect the residents of the school district.

Another function of business that I've been able to refine over the last several years is Organizational Health and Strategic Planning. One of the key components of organizational health, especially in public education, is open lines of communication. Communication in an organization of any kind is a function of the overall culture of the group, and open lines of communication must be in place to determine what we value as communities and what we value in education.

This has been an unprecedented time to be in a leadership role of any kind, let alone in public education. I've learned so much about myself and communicating with others from the challenges that the last year has presented.

4. Identify and prioritize the three most important challenges facing District 7. Please justify your prioritization. How do you propose to pay for these projects?

- **Addressing Learning Loss:** The District needs to take every measure to assess and provide assistance for students who may have experienced learning loss during the last year. Programs need to be established to prepare these pupils for future learning success. Partnerships with community groups, the relatively small amount of government relief we are receiving, and tuition-based summer programs can help offset the cost of such activities.

- **Financial Stability:** The district has seen a vast improvement with its finances over the last two years with the elimination of the deficit in the Education Fund, but the pandemic has created new and unique challenges that will create a ripple effect for years to come. Prudent spending and creative problem solving is of the utmost importance moving forward.
- **Continue the Implementation of Career and Technical Education:** Important steps were taken at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year to provide broader CTE opportunities to our students. We need to build upon these successes to provide as much preparation for our youth's post-high school endeavors. Collaboration with local contractors, employers, and unions is vital in order to create a low-cost win/win scenario for both our students and the companies they will work for out of high school.

5. What are your thoughts on school district finances?

- a. Are there opportunities to cut expenses?**
- b. Specifically, where are those opportunities?**

When I joined the board I came to realize how many cuts in expenditures had been made over the past ten years to help deal with the financial difficulties the district had experienced. With the additional revenue from Prop E there has been increased spending on critical items such as building maintenance, investing in technology, and curriculum improvement, but I still think there is opportunity to take a look at smaller and recurring expenses to see if the spending is necessary or if there are more cost-effective means to fulfill the same needs.

- c. Is there a need for new or additional revenue?**
- d. Specifically, where would it come from?**

For a public school district, there is always a need for new or additional revenue. As a board we need to concentrate on ways to generate supplemental funding to assist in improving the district. This would include grant-writing and strategic partnerships with businesses both locally and in the entire St. Louis region. It would also help if the State of Illinois changed the way the funded education.

- e. Are there areas where spending needs to be increased?
Specifically, where does spending need to increase?
Specifically, where would the money come from?**

The immediate need for remote and hybrid learning last year made evident just how far District 7 was behind in possessing and utilization of technology. The dependence on a robust technology plan as we continue to navigate uncertain times will require adequate hardware acquisition and maintenance in order to be successful. With World-Wide Technology and Amazon having large facilities within Edwardsville, value-added relationships need to be formed to help offset the cost of such critical endeavors

6. District 7's superintendent, approximately halfway through the employment contract, announced plans to depart; the district is currently engaging in a search for a new superintendent. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the new superintendent? What are your recommendations for minimizing superintendent and key personnel turnover?

The planning process for next school year will be almost completed by the time the new superintendent joins us on July 1st, so it's imperative that the board do whatever it can to ensure communication and collaboration occur from Day One. Concurrently the board and the superintendent need to work together to determine what our core values are as a district. (e.g., Service to our youth, open communication, trust, accountability, etc.) Culture can't be directed or taught; it will be a byproduct of living and working towards our core values every day. The Board, the Superintendent's office, and Administration especially need to concentrate on this, and as a result, a culture that values communication will be present. For me personally, I feel like the superintendent needs to engage with as many faculty and staff that he can to hear their successes and challenges. Employees want to feel valued for their work and contributions and that leads to future success as an organization and less turnover. The same approach needs to be taken with parents, taxpayers, and our elected officials both locally and in Springfield. Open lines of communication must be in place to determine what we value as communities and what we value in education.

7. In March 2018 the 1% county-wide school facilities sales tax appeared on the ballot for the third time, and Madison County voters resoundingly opposed the implementation of this additional sales tax. If elected, would you support putting this tax before voters for a fourth time? Why or why not?

I would not support putting this tax before the voters for a fourth time. The people have spoken loud and clear each time this has been on a ballot.

8. If you're the incumbent, what have been your significant accomplishments during your term? If you're the challenger, what do you believe have been the significant disappointments of the incumbents, and how would your term in office be different?

For the first time in decades the board was able to do a complete review and revision of its Board Policy Manual for the district. This manual is the comprehensive guide for all operations and policies for the district.

The district has seen a vast improvement with its finances over the last two years I've been on the board with balanced budgets and the elimination of the deficit in the Education Fund; and the improvement of our bond rating which helped save over \$1.1 million in debt service through refinancing while also reducing the tax levy in future fiscal years.

District 7 was able to go through this school year to date without any students, teachers, or family members experiencing significant COVID illness due to a school outbreak, all while having more in-person school days than most public schools of similar size in the St. Louis area. There were obviously stakeholders in the community who wanted more in-person days and schools of varying sizes that were able to attend in-person more, but in a district of 7,000 students over 185 square miles of diverse cities and villages, erring on the side of caution during an unprecedented health emergency was the prudent action to take.

9. If elected, how would you engage with the Edwardsville/Glen Carbon Chamber of Commerce as a conduit to the business community?

The success that we've experienced as a school district, and therefore as a community, is as a result of local businesses and business leaders who were engaged with the district. The Chamber of Commerce is a champion for local business, therefore in order to build strategic partnerships with these industries the Chamber will be a critical resource in helping the district create and implement new initiatives.

10. At the end of your term in office, how will you know if you've been successful?

I'm passionate about our communities. I know I will pour my heart and soul into adding as much value to the district as I can. When my term is over, if the combined efforts of the board members have helped to create a better education and a better environment for learning for our children, then I will feel like we have honored our duties as board members.

11. What changes you would like to see regarding:

a. how District 7 functions as a whole?

Better communication top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top. Same goes with external stakeholders. The pandemic uncovered a level of distrust that needs to be rectified.

b. how District 7 addresses unfunded mandates?

More collaboration with our representatives in Springfield.

c. how District 7 approaches curricula innovation?

More inclusion of teachers in the process. They can work with the administrators to provide feedback on how implementation of such innovation would work and its probability of success.

d. how District 7 prepares students for entry into the workforce?

A much broader range of career development opportunities along with expanded CTE offerings to give students a variety of paths to choose from.

e. how District 7 has managed the COVID-19 situation?

A Pandemic Task Force made up of different stakeholders which will take successes and misses from the past year and proactively plan for the future of this pandemic in addition to any further disruptions in education.