

Candidate: Lelan R. Olsen

Position Sought: Member Edwardsville USD#7 School Board

Family: Married to Colleen Olsen 26+ years

2 children Grace EHS graduate 2018, attends Butler University

Mitchell Junior at EHS. Set to graduate in the class of 2022.

Lived in District 7 we moved to the Edwardsville area in 1998

Education BS in Animal Science Kansas State University 1979

DVM Kansas State University 1990

Employment Owner/President Olsen Veterinary Clinic 2001- present

Seeking office: I am currently seeking a third term as a board member on the Edwardsville District School Board because in today's environment, we need experience at the table. With new information about COVID published all the time, we need to have continuity when making tough decisions. Running a school board is much like running a small business with an approximately 85 million dollar budget. I feel that I have the skillset that it takes to manage the budget. It is also my way of being a steward of the community and give my time and expertise back.

3) As I eluded to in the previous question, the management of running the school system is very much like managing a business—just on a bigger scale. I started my veterinary practice with just an idea and had to build it from the ground up. Some months the were leaner than others, so I needed to be creative and come up with ways to stretch the dollar to make ends meet. As I started seeing more of an increase in business and clientelle, I invested in technology that would be utilized in my business to keep progressive. I was collaborative and searched out best practices. When the Covid pandemic hit, we were deemed essential but we needed to find ways to maintain safety to my employees and clientelle. Having been worried how Covid would affect my business, I applied and received the EIBL an PPP loan through SBA.

4) COVID obviously. When the numbers were so high and it was not safe for the students or staff, we needed to put forth a plan which essentially

was full remote. Due to the district being so far behind in technology it was a struggle. The high school was in one to one technology, but the rest of the schools weren't. We needed to update the wifi in all the schools and needed to put hotspots in place to help the students continue to learn. We used some CARES funds to assist in funding. We are currently working to make the middle schools one to one in the fall and continue to update technology.

Having noted that not all students are meant to go to college, the district set forth seeking working relationship with the trade unions and vo-techs. This opened the door for several students to earn on-the-job training so when they graduate from high school, they will be set up to be an apprentice.

Diversity, equity and inclusion challenges-- Like it or not, our community is facing several race issues that are seen throughout the United States. We at the district are trying to be proactive and bridge the diversity gap by setting a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force. It is intended to bring people together and realize and become tolerant of each and everyone's differences.

5) a—We are always looking for ways to cut expenses, however the major cuts have already been done when the district was having financial issue several years earlier. We joined cooperatives to purchase food for the lunches, we purchased our own fuel to provide for bus service, and we joined a cooperative for the teacher's contract medical insurance.

b—Most of the money for the budget is from the local property taxes. Due to Edwardsville being considered a Tier 2 school we receive very little funding from the state so it must be generated locally. In order to increase funding, the voters would need to pass another tax levy which I do not think will happen in the near future. Grants may be a possibility to look at if we employ an experienced grant writer.

c—Yes the special ed department is grossly understaffed. This puts hardships on the students getting their required minutes and makes it difficult for the special ed students to be pushed in the general ed classrooms.

6) It is imperative that a board member and superintendent have an open door policy to keep lines of communication open that way the right hand will know what the left hand is doing. There must be some mutual respect and confidence that the superintendent has the experience and knowledge to do his job and the board doesn't micromanage. The current situation with the present superintendent leaving is unfortunate, however the current board is supportive of him.

As far as minimizing personell turnover, that is just part of running a business. When interviewing, you really do not get to know that person until you start working with them. If a person is worried about then maybe we can put language into the contract to discourage early departure or have a bonus or vesting program that are back-end loaded to encuourage longer tenures. But as I stated before, the circumstances were unfortuate and not for public opinion.

- 7) The intended money from that can only be used for buildings, secure land for buildings or building repair/remodels. It would be nice to have but the voters voted down the increase. Without a state statutory requirement, I would have to think hard if I would support the effort to place it on the ballot.
- 8) Having been on the board for almost 8 years, there is a lot that we have accomplished. When Jeff and I were elected 2013 we were able to bring transparency and collaboration to the board. As we continued and encountered the economic downturn where we were operating with a deficit, having used all of our cash reserves, we turned to Prop E which helped us put ourselves on stable ground and balance the budget for the first time in 7 years. With the passing of Prop E, we were able to update the techonolgy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and update some badly needed curriculum. We realized that not all students were meant to be college bound, so we partnered with the carpenters union and brought back vo-tech. We partnered with several local businesses and started a CEO program. We also partnered with SIU-E and Lewis and Clark Junior College to offer dual-credit coarses for our juniors and seniors. With the unsettling racial divide that has happened to the community, we listened. We started a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force to help with everyone to understand what is happening and how to repair the damage. We changed provisions in our policy manual to address the discretions. We have maintained our transparency so the public will know our stance and reasons for our stance. Last year we put together our long term strategic planning document to assist as we move forward.
- 9) We can expand on the CEO program in partnership with the Ed/Glen business community. We could also utilize the business community more with maybe having business leaders assist with career explorations or discussions of their expertise.
- 10) There have been many events that should bring pride to the community that the board has accomplished over the years. If you look at the overall test scores,

District 7 has constantly outperformed the state averages by over 70 points and have had a graduation rate of around 94%. Students have attended colleges and university from coast to coast and done well. They have continued to succeed in their field of choice. We as a board also realized that not every student is meant for college, so we collaborated and fostered pathways where our students can be prepared in the workforce with the “blue-collared” jobs that are more than respectable. We realize that there is a great need for those professions. We have been and will continue to be collaborative, be good stewards of the taxpayer's money and continue to put that shine back on District 7 as the preferred district of the Metro East.

11) a. I feel that the district has done well considering that we have to fund the district mostly from local taxpayers. We need to continue to be financially responsible but also remain progressive. We need to be transparent and collaborative and follow best practice rules.

b. We need to work with the state so that maybe some these unfunded mandates can be funded mandates thus freeing up some of the funds.

c. The district has started updating curriculum since the passing of Prop E. We have promised to invest in new technology to support the students. Examples would be like one to one technology, Schoology, streaming lessons, etc. We have promised to update the curriculum and technology on a 4 year cycle.

d. We will continue to look at programs that will further enhance our students into the workforce. This may be to continue to partner with SIU-E or Lewis and Clark with dual-credit classes or continue and seek new partnerships with professional unions, vo-techs and businesses such as flying, jet mechanics, auto mechanics, etc.

e. Continue to maintain safety protocols, continue to update technology to assure one to one learning, and maintain transparency and communicate with the stakeholders.