



Edwardsville | Glen Carbon
Chamber of Commerce

ECUSD#7: SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate: Jill Bertels

Position Sought: School Board for ECUSD #7

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

- a. your family:** My husband, 3 adult sons, 6 grandkids
- b. how long you've lived in District 7:** Lifelong D7 resident
- c. your education:** EHS graduate
- d. your employment:** Own and operate family farm with my husband and son

2. Why are you seeking this office? My drive to continue to serve on the board is that there is always more work to be done to improve our district. The board decisions on safety, curriculum and policies will continue to evolve with time. I want to be a part of the solution when problems occur within our district.

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? Being on the board since 1999, I have the experience and historical knowledge of where the district has been and the challenges we have faced in the past. District 7 has been through many peaks and valleys and we learn from each of them.

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?

A very important issue is the passing of the referendum on the April 4 ballot. The district has an opportunity to make upgrades, additions and improvements to all of our schools. The safety of our students and staff will be reinforced by the installation of double entry doors at each of our buildings. The renovation and rebuild of Lincoln Middle School, Hamel and Midway elementary buildings will develop an outstanding learning environment for those students. The addition onto the commons at the high school will give much needed space for that building. There is also discussion for improvements to playgrounds and some gyms and media centers throughout the district. This work can be done with no change to our property tax rate.

Safety of our students and staff is very important. We want those in our building to feel they are safe while in at work and in the classroom. The proposed double entry at each of our buildings is a good start. But we also need to have those making checks of our outside doors

throughout the day. We need to have our staff know who are in the buildings, so if someone that is not known, is seen in a hallway or on a camera screen, it can be noted and investigated immediately. Some of these things are on the list of improvements with the passing of the bond issue, others would be paid for through health life safety funds, technology funds and/or the education fund.

Another important issue is the retention of our staff. Teachers and support staff are the face of our district. They are the people who teach and see our students in the classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, media centers and on the playgrounds. During COVID these people worked extremely hard to keep the students educational experiences on track. That was a challenging times, and it wasn't without faults, but it did take a toll on everyone. The board and the administration is continually looking for ways to make the best hire for our open positions and work with our unions to improve our work environments and increase the pay schedule to be competitive.

5. What are your thoughts on school district finances?

a. Are there opportunities to cut expenses? When programs are cut, it comes at the expense of a student's education. The district has been in the situation to be forced to make cuts and it brings out the passion of those affected and it pains those making the cuts. The district is still "paying the price" of decisions that we were forced to make while we were on the financial watch list. We stalled on curriculum studies, the purchase of technology upgrades, making building improvements and other things.

Specifically, where are those opportunities?

b. Is there a need for new or additional revenue? Thanks to the passing of Prop E, the district has the opportunity of making needed improvements that had been delayed and building our reserves. There are new dollars coming from E rate funding, state funding that is no longer prorated and now higher interest rates

Specifically, where would it come from?

c. Are there areas where spending needs to be increased? Our biggest expense is payroll. It is important to retain quality teachers and other staff members. Their pay needs to be competitive with the neighboring districts to attract/retain quality staff.

Specifically, where does spending need to increase?

Specifically, where would the money come from?

6. The April 4 school district bond proposition reads, "Shall the Board of Education of Edwardsville Community Unit School District Number 7, Madison County, Illinois, improve the sites of, build and equip additions to and alter, repair and equip school buildings, including constructing security improvements and secured entryways, and issue bonds of said School District to the amount of \$100,000,000 for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?" What is your position on the bond proposal and why? I encourage the public to vote "YES" on April 4. The passing will not increase the tax rate for our citizens, yet it will give the district the opportunity

to make schools safer by adding double entry doors, renovate and rebuild Lincoln Middle School and Midway and Hamel elementary and add onto the commons at EHS. There is also discussion of improvements to playgrounds and some gyms and media centers at other elementary buildings. If the bond does not pass, the district will do needed improvements to some of these buildings by issuing life safety bonds.

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 believe the voters have given their opinions three times on this matter.

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? Some of the toughest decisions made by the board were during COVID. It was a time when opinions ranged from one extreme to the other and no one knew when it would be over. Obviously, COVID is still in our lives today, but in a completely different way than in 2020-21. The teachers worked extremely hard, learning the details of ZOOM and elearning in a short amount of time. Students are still struggling with social skills and other learning habits that came from the time out of the classroom. But our district is now rebounding from these challenges. We have made improvements in the area of technology for our students and staff. With determination and grit while in and out of the classroom, the staff and administration worked together for the good of the students and fought each challenge as they presented themselves.

9. If elected, how would you engage with the Edwardsville/Glen Carbon Chamber of Commerce as a conduit to the business community? The board is responsible for hiring the superintendent to be the face of the district to the Chamber and area businesses.

10. At the end of your term in office, how will you know if you've been successful? I am determined to make the best decisions for all involved and I am committed to making Edwardsville School District a rewarding place to educate our students, a positive environment for our employees, an ideal location to have a business and a great community in which to live.

11. What changes you would like to see regarding:

a. how District 7 functions as a whole? Hire a superintendent that has vision and energy and drive to make our district attractive to good hires and residents

b. how District 7 addresses unfunded mandates? Have a presence at the state level to inform those voting how the schools are affected by their decisions.

c. how District 7 approaches curricula innovation? Stay up to date with curriculum studies and materials for our staff and students.

d. how District 7 prepares students for entry into the workforce? Continue to explore how we can expose students to the trades as well as traditional universities.

e. how District 7 has managed the pandemic? See answer on question 8