

District 719 School Board Candidate Responses

Candidates are organized alphabetically by last name.

You can also view the responses [via video on our YouTube Channel](#).

Hosted By:



Note: responses were not received from Amy Bullyan or Dustin Smith.

Jennifer Anderson

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Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

I am Jennifer Anderson. Middle School Parent. Naval Officer. Redtail Ridge PTC Alum. Youth Sports Coach. Savage Neighbor. Education and service have always been core values. Nurtured by my family, these principles guided my career and my lifelong learning. I have always felt a deep sense of duty to give back to the institutions and communities that have given so much to me. As my son begins middle school and my time in service to our country is nearing retirement, I feel it is time for me to contribute in larger ways to our community. Encouraged by neighbors and community members to run for the School Board, I know the timing is finally right. I am ready to serve our students, teachers, staff, and community.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

Every student deserves to graduate prepared for college, vocational training, military service, an apprenticeship, or the workforce. Our goal is to ensure every graduate has the education, skills, and confidence to take their next step successfully. That means maintaining strong academics, expansion of career and technical education, work-based learning, internships, apprenticeships, or other opportunities that allow students to develop practical skills and explore careers before they graduate. It means building strong community partnerships that help us understand what skills employers need, exposing students to careers available right here in our community while creating opportunities for mentoring, job shadowing, and hands-on learning. When a student graduates from our district, do they have the education, skills, and confidence to take that next step? I want the answer to be a resounding yes for every student. The Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Minnesota statute ensures that school districts offer this kind of teaching and learning. And requires districts to have comprehensive, long-term strategic plans to address these goals—that all students are career and college ready, and graduate from high school.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

Our priority is to maintain strong educational opportunities while ensuring long-term financial sustainability. This begins with understanding current and future enrollments trends, which must guide decisions about staffing, programs, facilities, and expenditures. We must continue to work closely with the state legislature to secure predictable funding so local taxpayers do not bear the full responsibility for funding public

education. Clearly communicating the value of a strong school district is vital, as quality education directly strengthens our community, supports property values, and attracts new families and businesses. We must remain committed to matching ongoing expenditures with ongoing revenues. Difficult decisions are sometimes unavoidable, but responsible leadership requires us to address financial challenges rather than postpone them. The November referendum is an important part of the discussion, but regardless of its outcome, fiscal discipline must remain a priority. Our goal should be a district that provides excellent educational opportunities, uses taxpayer dollars wisely, and is financially sustainable for future generations.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

Advancing technology may be the biggest issue and opportunity facing education. The world of education is changing at a speed almost incomprehensible because of technology, demands of the world, and people's changing expectations. Expectations are higher and districts are coming under heavier scrutiny every year. Technology is changing so rapidly, what we budget and plan for five to ten years down the road needs to be agile adapting infrastructure and not simply buying new gadgets. Technology is a disrupter in that it creates enrollment competition and it is also a powerful tool that transforms classroom learning. Today parents can enroll their students in any kind of environment; it has opened multiple opportunities for how students can be educated. Additionally, technology has significantly altered the available tools to educate students. As a district we need to figure out how to manage these changes and challenges, turning them into opportunities that ensure the best K-12 educational system possible. One that our students, employees, families, and entire community can be proud.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

I have worked with diverse groups to solve problems, build consensus, and achieve shared goals. Serving as a Navy chaplain reinforced the importance of listening first, building trust, and creating space for respectful dialogue. The best decisions come when people feel heard, even if they disagree. Strong schools rely on families, educators, and community members working together. I am committed to open, respectful communication and strengthening the partnership between schools and community.

Lisa Atkinson

Website: lisaatkinsonforschoolboard.com

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

Hi I am Lisa Atkinson, my husband Paul and I have been residents of Prior Lake for the past 15 years along with our three children. Four years ago I was elected to serve our community with a commitment to bring greater transparency, fiscal responsibility, academic excellence and a common sense, conservative perspective to the school board. I believe I have delivered on that promise. During my first term, in the one year we had a conservative majority, I voted to eliminate the DEI officer position, end the district's DEI resolution, and restore a balanced budget. There is more work to be done, which is why I am running for re-election and would be honored to continue to serve our community.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

Our district has created valuable college and career opportunities through programs such as MNCAPS, PSEO, and AP courses. I believe we must build on that success while strengthening academic accountability.

Too many students have honor roll grades while proficiency data show that more than 40% of our students are not proficient in reading and math, and approximately 60% are not proficient in science. We have rising graduation rates with declining proficiency scores which should raise a red flag to every school board member.

For the past eight years, equity-based initiatives have shaped our district's priorities, yet student proficiency has not improved, as promised. It is time to refocus on accountability, academic mastery and high expectations and to deliver the foundational skills every student needs to succeed in college, a career, and life after high school.

Our community expects the academic excellence promised in our strategic plan. We must ensure every student graduates with the knowledge, practical skills, and work ethic needed to succeed in the real world.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

The most important lesson I've learned as a board member is the board must hold administration accountable to follow budget policies and ensure resources improve student outcomes.

I have not supported a district budget during my first term because I didn't believe the proposed budgets met that standard. In 2023, the Board majority approved \$4 million in new investments, including recurring administrative expenses and additional technology. I opposed them because I was not convinced they would help improve student outcomes, and was not comfortable making an ongoing commitment without understanding it's long-term impact on the district's financial health.

The following year, district expenditures exceeded revenue by close to \$7M without the board approving a revised budget.

Fiscal responsibility requires more than trusting the system. It means having the courage to ask hard questions, demand transparency, and hold administration accountable. Our limited resources must prioritize classrooms, improvements in student achievement, and programs that directly benefit students - not political agendas or progressive initiatives that lack measurable results. Every dollar spent should improve student outcomes.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

I believe the biggest issue facing our district is declining enrollment. Every student who chooses other educational options represents approximately \$10,000 in lost annual revenue. At roughly 100 fewer students per year, that is about \$1 million in revenue. Take, for example, this fall's Kinder enrollment is at 485 students, compared with our graduating class at 750. Thirty-five percent fewer students are choosing to begin their educational journey with Prior Lake Savage Area Schools than are graduating. Those numbers are concerning.

I believe the heart of the issue is that we need to understand why families are choosing other educational options. We cannot reverse declining enrollment until we understand the root causes and give families compelling reasons to choose PLSAS.

With our enrollment projections, we have to make difficult decisions. We cannot continue operating facilities and programs based on enrollment that never materialized. We must right-size our district, protect classroom resources, and focus on academic excellence, strong teachers, safe schools, and opportunities that make PLSAS the first choice for families. Students should never feel the impact if resources are properly allocated to the classroom.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

I'm the best candidate, as an experienced leader with a four-year record of representing our community with courage, conviction, and grace. I'm not afraid to ask hard questions, challenge decisions, and demand accountability while celebrating students. I have kept my promises of transparency, fiscal responsibility, and academic excellence, while putting students first. I would be honored to continue to serve our community, bringing a conservative, common-sense perspective to the board.

Nancy Dager

Website: nancydagerforplsas.com

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

My name is Nancy Dager. I'm a mom of three PLSAS students, a wife, licensed social worker, and lifelong volunteer. I've had the opportunity to see education from many perspectives—as a parent, PTC board member, teacher, social worker, and therapist working with students.

Those experiences have taught me to listen first and ask questions before reaching conclusions. I'm running because I believe serving on the School Board is truly public service. I want to work hard for our students and community, provide thoughtful oversight, and help bring people together.

We don't have to agree on everything, but I believe we can listen to one another, treat each other with respect, and work together for our kids.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

I think we first need to recognize that success after high school will look different for every student. For one student, it may be a four-year college. For another, it could be a two-year degree, skilled trade, apprenticeship, military service, or going directly into the workforce. One path should not be viewed as more successful than another.

I would like students exposed to these choices earlier. Career and technical education, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and partnerships with local employers can allow students to actually experience different careers instead of simply reading about them. We also need to listen to our students. What are they interested in? Where are their strengths? What opportunities are they asking for?

Our job shouldn't be to tell every student what their path should look like. Our job as board members is to give students a strong academic foundation, expose them to meaningful options, and make sure they leave District 719 prepared and confident about whatever path they choose.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

Every financial decision should start with a simple question: How will this affect our students?

We know there are difficult financial decisions ahead, and the Board has a responsibility to be fiscally responsible. But I also want us asking: How do we keep class sizes manageable? How do we maintain rigor in our programs? And how do we protect the opportunities that are important to our students?

Before we say, "We have to cut this," I want us to ask, "Is there another way to do it?" Can we provide the same opportunity differently? Can we find a partnership, an alternative source of funding, or savings somewhere that has less direct impact on students?

Not every program or expense can be protected, and difficult choices will have to be made. That is exactly why I believe Board members need to ask hard questions and fully understand the alternatives before making those decisions.

For me, the priority is clear: be responsible with taxpayer dollars while minimizing the impact on our students and their education.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

Beyond the financial challenges, I believe one of the biggest issues facing our district is strengthening trust among families, teachers, staff, district leadership, the School Board, and our community.

Trust begins with listening. People need to know their concerns are being heard and that different perspectives are respected, even when we disagree. When people trust their schools, they are more likely to stay engaged, work collaboratively, support the district, and encourage others to be part of our school community.

I would like to see us move away from divisions that make people feel they are on opposing sides and focus instead on what we have in common. We can disagree respectfully, ask difficult questions, hold one another accountable, and still work together.

As a board member, I would listen carefully first, ask questions, communicate openly, and work to build collaboration. We may not always agree on how to get there, but I believe we share the same goal: helping our students succeed and making District 719 the strongest it can be.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

I bring experience as a parent, educator, social worker, therapist, volunteer, and PTC board member. Those roles have taught me to listen carefully, ask difficult questions respectfully, and look at an issue from more than one perspective. I understand that the Board must provide accountability without micromanaging. I'm not running with a personal agenda. I'm running to serve, to listen, to work hard, and to make thoughtful decisions for our students and community.

Jessica Olstad

Website: jess4plsas.com

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

My name is Jessica Olstad, and I'm a proud Laker mama.

My husband and I have lived in the district since 2012 with our two kids. Our son is a 7th grader, and our daughter is a sophomore.

A little about me – I grew up in Michigan and married a Minnesotan. I'm proud to be a breast cancer thriver. I've spent my career in journalism and public relations. Now I manage media relations for the City of Minneapolis.

What motivates me to run? KIDS! After four years, I hope that our community knows that my heart beats for public education. I have 3 priorities: to advocate for equity for all students, create solid financial footing starting with a passed levy and a continued, loyal leadership to move our district into the next 75 years.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

Our students have so many interests beyond high school – and sometimes college isn't in those plans. They may want to enter the workforce right away or enlist in the military. All options are good options when you're a graduate of Prior Lake High School.

When it comes to work-based learning, there's no better example than our MNCAPS program. It's an incredibly popular catalyst for beyond-high-school training. We've had to make some unfortunate decisions with this program, and I'm hopeful with the community's investment in the referendum, we can perhaps put more money back into this popular program. I'd love to bring back pathways that we've had to suspend.

I think much of our work-based learning could start even earlier. With the help of our community and amazing employers, we could partner with administration to bring people into our schools as young as elementary to really get students excited about what comes next. Sometimes when you're in fifth grade, being a senior seems a lifetime away. But we all know it goes really fast, and sometimes – like me – a student's interest in a specific field could start to blossom as soon as elementary. I'd love to harness that excitement.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

This year is our district's 75th anniversary. I believe one of the board's priorities close to my heart is ensuring that our district's next 75 years is built on solid financial footing and in a comfortable and welcoming place for our students and teachers. I'm a strong supporter of the levy questions on the ballot this fall, including the state's constitutional amendment question. While passing this action would not "fix" every single financial problem, it's what is needed to set us up for success. I believe in strong public education, and our kids and teachers are worth our efforts to strengthen the foundation of our amazing schools. This also takes a very strong partnership with administration to do what's needed. We need to trust the team to know what's best.

I also want to advocate more on behalf of students and teachers not just in our district, but also across Minnesota. We need public education adequately funded at the state level. Right now, the support offered is not sustainable. I have no doubt we can force real conversation around supporting our schools.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

I see a few challenges beyond the financial issues. We're losing good staff and talented people to other districts. I want Prior Lake Savage Area Schools to be a destination district again, not just for our kids, but for the people teaching them, too.

Second, we have a public relations and perception problem. Our biggest key message needs to be one of unity, pride and resilience, not one of distrust, rumors and innuendo. We need to come together again as a Laker family to face these challenges head on – and as a community, support public education.

What can the board do about it? I go back to our retreat from a few weeks ago. We need to be a team - not just at the board table – but even more so when we're not. Being a team doesn't mean we'll agree on everything. But we need to be unified in board action. Everything else is a distraction.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

Our community needs constant, loyal leadership that I know I can provide. I'll be the steady leader that continues to show up and stand up for our kids and staff. That certainly doesn't mean I'm not open to change. I always appreciate different perspectives. I may disagree with a position, but I'll always respect it. I want to show my kids and others that compromise is welcome and so is standing up for what you believe.

I want to show our community love, compassion and fortitude this fall.

Aaron Provancha

Website: aaronforboard.com

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

My wife and I have known each other since 4th grade and have been married for 17 years. We are raising two adventurous and creative kids, one is going into 5th grade and the other into 7th grade. We have lived in Prior Lake since 2020. I have been an educator and firefighter, serving my community and educating our future. I work in the healthcare providing educational opportunities to nurses, doctors, and coders at hospitals in the US and abroad. I have classroom and business experience. I have a master's degree in educational leadership. I am motivated to solve issues that impact students, supporting programs that give our students an edge, all while collaborating with our community. I know how education works because I've lived it.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

We should be expanding these programs, not reducing them, by protecting the funding needed to support them. I have heard first-hand how impactful MNCAPS is from parents who had their children go through the program at PLHS. Their stories all had one thing in common: they had kids who were disengaged or wanted more from school so they connected with the MNCAPS program and found engaging learning outside of the typical classroom environment. One family even told me their daughter just graduated from PLHS this last spring and enrolled in a local college; something they didn't think was going to happen. We must continue these opportunities and grow this program and others like it, to provide future generations the chance to engage in education in different ways because not all kids learn the same way. I want all of our students to have the chance to learn with hands-on programs. In 24-25 we had a graduation rate of 95% and kids who continued onto continue their education was 98%. These results clearly show that these programs work and we should continue to fund them.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

The board needs to focus on trust and active community engagement to inform people how they can support our schools, financially and beyond. I have heard from community members throughout our neighborhoods that our schools are doing poorly. When we compare 23-24 versus 24-25 MCA science scores we see a dip in performance, but no one has addressed the reality or communicated the truth: state requirements increased the rigor. Kids in 23-24 took a completely different test. Improving the scores would require investing in new curriculum from the bottom up. It is easy to misunderstand the lowered performance at face value. The board needs to provide this information to the public so they can understand the real situation and not allow the public to make assumptions about our schools performance. Trust is easily lost, but difficult to regain.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

Divide and polarization due to misinformation and misrepresentation from a lack of collaborative leadership. This goes beyond the collaboration in the board room; extend the collaboration to our community. We always hear the typical platitudes - words like - transparency, communication, collaboration; but great collaborative leaders do more than speak big words; we recognize them by their actions, not their intentions. The best leaders I've known never spoke to their great leadership, they demonstrated it. Great leaders collaborate well and are always people who need no introduction, they lead with the best interest of those they serve and in the case of the board; the students and the community. We need to find ways to connect our general population to our board members with positive engagement

and demonstrate that the board can collaborate as leaders with the community for the best possible educational outcomes for students. We must keep student learning in mind while maintaining a financially viable budget and speak with a unified voice from a collaborative position.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

As a firefighter I know how to serve my community. I have first-hand experience inside modern classrooms and know the challenges educators face. My business skills will serve our community in solving what matters while using fiscal responsibility in decision making. I am a unique candidate with a range of experience that will serve the community and our students well. I do not use the same tool for every problem; I dig through my toolbox until I find the right one for the job.

Amy Witt

Website: amy4schoolboard.com

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

Hello all! First, thank you for allowing me here to share about myself and my visions for the district. I apologize for my absence, but I am working, helping the littlest boys and girls make their way into the world!

My husband, Adam, and I moved our family to Prior Lake in 2010. We have 4 children, aged 6-25. Our oldest is a PLHS graduate, and our three younger children are still in the district. I have been a nurse since 2007 and have been working in labor and delivery for the last 11 years. I am also a member of St Michael's Catholic Church.

I decided I wanted to run for school board after watching the difference in expectations and skills at school between my first and second children.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

As I mentioned, I have seen a difference in the skills and expectations of students decline over the years. These include using less technology to increase other skills, including penmanship, cursive writing and reading, face-to-face interactions, dealing with confrontation., and more. These skills are all necessary in the real world and therefore need more focus in the classroom. If we can give students confidence in these skills, other harder situations will be easier to navigate. Other things I believe will help are increased involvement in the Arts. The Arts are shown to increase students' confidence, critical thinking, and mental health. Health classes should also have increased focus on coping and physical and mental wellness.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

More important than the referendum passing is electing board members who will fight to use finances in ways that have the best outcomes for students. With the finances available, we need to focus on making cuts that will have the least amount of impact on student performance or improvements that give the greatest growth to the greatest number of students. This may include improved curriculum, more availability in the Arts or advanced classes. While not all classes or programs can have equal funding, it is important to weigh the pros and cons of any decision prior to implantation. We should also have transparency and look to the community for input whenever possible.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

Besides finances, I believe trust and communication between the district and the community. We have had so many instances over the years without transparent communication, especially regarding spending, that has hurt the relationship between district and community. It will take time and improved communication to repair this relationship. The district needs to engage the community in more decisions, and be more transparent with the decision that are made, including rationale and benefits of decisions.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

I am committed to student success and understand that success depends on strong finances, staff support, and student safety. I will listen to our community and stand up for what I believe is best for students and the long-term health of our district. I am willing to have difficult conversations, hear differing opinions, admit when I'm wrong, and change my mind when needed. I will work hard, learn from others, and approach every challenge with respect and a smile.

Dillon Ziegler

Please tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to run for office.

Hello! My name is Dillon Ziegler. I am a lifelong resident of Savage, MN, having lived here for the entirety of my 25 years. I attended Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools for every year of my K-12 education, graduating from PLHS in 2019. I currently work as a special education paraprofessional at an elementary school in Eagan, having just begun my fourth year in this role.

I am running for PLSAS School Board because I want to help shape our society into one that is conducive for everyone to thrive, and that begins with our students, our leaders of tomorrow. As someone who struggled severely in school myself, I have a passion for helping to ensure that other students have a smoother and less stressful experience.

How should District 719 prepare students for both college and career, including career and technical education, work-based learning, and partnerships with local employers?

I believe the programs our district currently offers, such as MNCAPS and PSEO, do a good job helping students prepare for their futures. Bridges Area Learning Center also provides flexible schedules and work programs for students whose needs or goals may not fit the traditional school structure. Our district already has partnerships with local businesses for job shadowing, internships, and other hands-on work-based learning for students. I'd like to see the district build on these existing programs, while also creating more opportunities for career exploration. For example, incorporating more career and job fairs at the middle schools and high school. This will allow students to see real options before they graduate, become familiar with career fields that pique their interests, and feel more comfortable with choosing non-traditional post-secondary pathways. As someone who only attended college for three months before realizing that it wasn't the right path for me, I believe it is important for our schools to continue to foster a culture in which not pursuing college is destigmatized and viewed as a respectable and valid choice.

Given the district's recent budget reductions, enrollment challenges, and the referendum on the November ballot, what should the School Board prioritize to ensure the district is financially sustainable while maintaining strong educational opportunities for students?

I believe our community should support the referendum on the November ballot. Increasing the amount of funding per student would help Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools become more competitive with other districts, and it could help attract more families and address our enrollment challenges. However, we also need to recognize that relying heavily on local property taxes to fund public education is a fundamentally flawed system. The school board should advocate for changes at state and federal levels. More stable and equitable funding for public schools, greater state and federal investment, and more flexibility to diversify local revenue. I also strongly support the statewide constitutional amendment on November's ballot that would increase funding for all school districts through Minnesota's Permanent School Fund without raising individual income or property taxes. As a community, we should work to ensure that amendment passes. Ultimately, financial sustainability requires both responsible local budgeting and advocacy for a more equitable funding system that allows schools to maintain strong educational opportunities for every student.

Beyond the district's financial challenges, what do you see as the biggest issue facing Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and what should the School Board do to address it?

I believe the biggest issue facing our district is our failure to create an inclusive environment where every student feels safe, secure, and like they belong. We haven't succeeded at that, and the school board needs to take a more active role in addressing it. We need to be vocal about discrimination when it happens. There have been reported incidents of racism in our schools, as well as situations involving transphobia, and we need to call these out. Having open conversations and the language around these issues need to be normalized, so students know that we take these issues seriously, that we care, and

we've got their backs. We also need to be more inclusive of students with different learning styles and needs. Not every student learns the same way, yet our education system often pushes students to conform to a specific standard. We should be more open-minded and creative in our approach and focus our efforts on reshaping the system to fit students, rather than forcing students to fit the system.

Why are you the best candidate to represent us on the District 719 school board?

I believe that people who have been given decision-making power should actually reflect the lived experiences of those who've been elected to serve. I will bring fresh perspectives to the school board as the only candidate or member who has first-hand experience as a student in this district and who also works directly with students and staff on a daily basis, providing me with personal knowledge of the systemic and day-to-day struggles of schools on a wider scale.