



The Good Government Council (GGC), a committee of the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce, was formed to act as a focal point for voluntary political involvement by the business community and other interested individuals in the Eau Claire area. One of the main objectives of the GGC is to learn about candidates' positions on various issues and inform and educate our members. The Chamber does not endorse candidates. For more information about the Chamber and its Governmental Affairs programs, contact Scott Rogers: rogers@eauclairechamber.org or 715-834-1204.

We have provided candidates for the Altoona School Board the opportunity to fill out the below questionnaire to share their thoughts on some issues with the area business community. Here are the responses as we received them from each of the candidates. Candidates are arranged alphabetically. We encourage you to pass on this communication to anyone interested in learning more about the candidates and their position on issues. There are two candidates for the one at-large open seat on the School Board.

Altoona School Board Candidate Questionnaire Spring Election, 2018

1. What are your background and qualifications for this position, and why are you a candidate?

Mike Hilger (Incumbent): I taught in the English Department at UW-EC for 30 years. As a professional educator I bring that perspective to the Altoona School Board of which I have been a member for 7 years. I am proud to be a member of this board, which is hard-working and knowledgeable. Two of our members have gained the Wisconsin Association of School Board's category five achievement level, the highest level, and I have category four. The current Altoona School Board is an effective team; we take the time that we need to discuss issues in regular and special meetings and we are able to reach consensus on most issues. This school board played a big role in the referendum which enabled the new Altoona Elementary School to be built and in the refurbishing of the intermediate and middle schools. This board also reached a responsible resolution to the resignation of the superintendent. I am a candidate because I value learning as integral in addressing the needs of individuals and the needs of our community. I appreciate the unique challenges of public education in maintaining and promoting a positive learning environment for a diverse student population. I would like to be a part of the process of selecting the next superintendent while also safeguarding the excellent educational programs and staff that are currently in place in the District.

Richard Risler Jr.: I am a married father of 3 children that are enrolled in the Altoona School District, ages 4, 8 and 11. I was educated at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, earning Masters Degrees in both Business Administration, and Education. Currently, I am employed by a multinational company

in the field of medical sales. I have also been a member of various community Boards including the Epilepsy Foundation of Western Wisconsin as well as a member of the Church Council at Trinity Lutheran Church in Eau Claire. I am running for the position of School Board Member because I believe there are few things more important than providing quality education for our children. The Altoona School District is currently at a critical crossroad in determining the trajectory of the district moving forward, and I believe my skill set would help to navigate a positive change.

2. With a strong local economy and low unemployment, many businesses report difficulty in filling key positions. What can the school system do to promote a skilled workforce for the area sufficient to meet the needs of business and industry?

Mike Hilger (Incumbent): The High School has initiated an Academic and Career Placement Program to prepare those who want to enter the workforce after their senior year. The District also maintains a long list of business partnerships. Students have the opportunity to work with businesses to achieve a level of competence to facilitate job placement. Our school system is also preparing a significant number of students to enter the programs at CVTC and UW-EC which will lead to immediate entry to the local workforce.

Richard Risler Jr.: As stated in the Altoona School District Strategic Plan, the primary goals for students is to “exit the system prepared for success in post-secondary endeavors”. This goal starts by recognizing each student has “unique strengths and potential” and we as a district must be flexible in both providing, and supporting, each students “individualized learning opportunities”. This idea begins with promoting engaging curriculums which start in Kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. One great example where the Altoona School District has led the way is in the recent investment in the Fabrication Laboratories (Fab Labs) Program. Per the 2016 District press release, “Fab Labs provide hands-on learning to the next generation of workers to provide our students with the skills they need to obtain good paying jobs”. These are the types of programs that will benefit “students, school districts and local economies”, and these are programs well worth the investment.

3. What is the role of the school board in ensuring the safety of students in the community?

Mike Hilger (Incumbent): The District has taken many steps to enhance the safety of students. For example, when designing and remodeling our schools, we instituted a secure entrance system and a safer routing of student buses. We maintain school safety patrols at crossings near the school. We also have a police liaison officer. The District's safety efforts are ongoing and issues are addressed in conjunction with local law enforcement officials.

Richard Risler Jr.: The School Board is ultimately responsible for creating, implementing and funding the policies and procedures regarding the safety of our students. However this must be done in conjunction, and ultimately with guidance from, those who have expertise on these matters. These may include, but not be limited to Local Law Enforcement, the School Resource Officer and School Psychologists. We must also promote Teacher, Parent and Student awareness of these issues to identify potential signs of trouble so that we have the best chance to avoid any possible tragedy. To that end, the Altoona School District has been leading on these issues, from the development of an emergency management plan, to a recent School Safety meeting for parents hosted by the Altoona Police Department. This is a critical issue of our time and one that must be remedied to ensure the safety of all students, teachers and staff.

4. What do you believe citizens of the district would identify as the top three priorities for their School Board?

Mike Hilger (Incumbent): 1) The board should do everything possible to ensure that the excellent reputation of Altoona schools continues. The schools received high marks on the state report cards. Open enrollment draws approximately twice as many students into our schools, from other schools, as compared to the number of students who open enroll out of the district. 2) The board should encourage students to be active and effective participants in society who also have a high regard for civil service and patriotism. Highly-developed problem solving and critical thinking skills are vital in a fast-changing world. 3) The board should be committed to excellence in teaching and individualized high achievement for all students.

Richard Risler Jr.: The first and most important priority for the School Board is to ensure student achievement. With this as the primary goal, there is clear direction in every decision the Board makes. Secondly, I believe the citizens of the School District would expect fiscal responsibility with their tax dollars. Citizens should demand a board member pay close attention to the finances and to understand the financial health of the district. This would include being able to attract and retain the highest quality Administrators, Teachers and Staff while remaining competitive with surrounding school districts in compensation and benefit packages. The third priority would be to rebuild the trust and confidence in the School Board as they begin the process of filling the Superintendent vacancy.