

2020 SPFE Board of Education Candidate Public Questionnaire

The 2020 SPFE Board of Education Candidate Public Questionnaire consists of two sections: five yes/no questions and eight long answer questions. Candidate responses are listed in alphabetical order. No edits were made to any responses.

Former Director Keith Hardy did not respond to our invitation to participate in the SPFE COPE (Committee on Political Education) screening process, and did not return a completed questionnaire.

Please limit the following questions to a yes or no response.

1. The Saint Paul Federation of Educators believes that parents, educators, and community members and students should be at the center of decision making around educational policy. However, there has been an increase in money from out-of-state millionaires with a vested interest in pursuing a corporate education reform agenda removing local voices from discussions about our children’s education.

- a. **Will you and your campaign reject contributions and independent expenditures from wealthy donors who live outside our community and from market-based education reform organizations?**

Candidate	Yes	No
Charlotte “Charlie” Castro	X	
James Farnsworth	X	
Jamila Mame	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Jim Vue	X	

2. Despite recent increases, public education statewide is severely underfunded, and has not kept pace with inflation. Communities have increasingly been called on to make up the lack of funding by passing levies that increase property taxes for homeowners, while wealthy corporations continue to receive tax cuts – allowing them to benefit from our communities without contributing to them.

- a. **Will you as endorse, support, and campaign on increasing revenue that will go directly to public education funding?**

Candidate	Yes	No
Charlotte “Charlie” Castro	X	
James Farnsworth	X	
Jamila Mame	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Jim Vue	X	

3. SPFE members have indicated that they do not want to participate in Q-Comp (Quality Compensation). The core components of Q-Comp include: performance pay and salary schedule reform, teacher evaluation, and job-embedded professional development. Each Q-Comp plan must include all of the core components. The implementation of Q-Comp requires performance pay to be based on standardized test scores. This funding and terms are dependent on action by the state legislature.

- a. **Would you support moving the funding and capacity put into Tim Pawlenty's failed teacher merit pay scheme commonly called q-comp, into equitable funding for all Minnesota districts general budget?**

Candidate	Yes	No
Charlotte "Charlie" Castro	X	
James Farnsworth	X	
Jamila Mame	X	
Omar Syed		X
Jim Vue	X	

4. **Do you support a moratorium on all new charter schools opening in St. Paul as well as a moratorium of any expansions of existing charter schools already in St. Paul?**

Candidate	Yes	No
Charlotte "Charlie" Castro	X	
James Farnsworth	X	
Jamila Mame	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Jim Vue		X

5. **Do you support collective bargaining for public sector unions?**

Candidate	Yes	No
Charlotte "Charlie" Castro	X	
James Farnsworth	X	
Jamila Mame	X	
Omar Syed	X	
Jim Vue	X	

Please limit your response to 150 words or fewer for each part of the questions below.

1. *What is the value of public education for you and for the city of Saint Paul?*

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

Value means that I should be able to put a price on education. A good solid education based on restorative practices and an accurate portrayal of history lend itself to an invaluable gift. An education rooted in equity can help produce the best students in our community and allows students to become whatever they want without limitation. The more well-rounded students that are educated with that solid foundation often times become our cities’ best ambassadors for funding, quality resources and support partners.

James Farnsworth

A strong public school system is the cornerstone of a strong community. As a proud graduate of SPPS, I can personally attest to the student experience in SPPS. I feel incredibly lucky to have benefitted from such dedicated and transformative teachers. Specifically, to the question, not only should a high quality public education be a fundamental right for every student in Saint Paul, but SPPS needs strong community partnerships in order to enhance the lives of students and teachers/staff in buildings. During these unusual and incredibly difficult times, community partnerships are essential to not only ensure the success of education delivery, but to ensure those other family supports (food, clothing, internet, etc.) so kids can engage with school/their education.

Jamila Mame

To me, the fundamental purpose of our public school system should be to create an equitable space for our students and community to thrive. The way that we teach our students and interact with the families in our communities is a reflection of our collective values. When I think of public education -- particularly in a diverse city such as Saint Paul -- I see it as an opportunity to truly live up to the values and standards that we have set for ourselves.

Omar Syed

I believe public education is a great investment for state government. The economic and social benefits from high quality education provides a foundation for success of our students and the welfare of communities. Investing in public education is more cost effective for our state than paying for issues caused by underfunded low quality schools. Society improves when the educated population improves. Every child deserves the exposure to a high quality, diverse school system.

Jim Vue

As for the city of Saint Paul, public education is essential to the maintenance and reproduction towards a shared collective experience on the emerging citizenry of its students. As for me, Public Education is the arena where my orientation towards this collective experience is put into practice in order to contribute towards its needed growth. In short, the value of public education has deep ramifications towards my sense of belonging in Saint Paul and how I want to see the city evolve through my work.

2. *An endorsement from SPFE is only given to candidates that show they are a champion for public education. We do not endorse in all races.*

a. ***What are your direct connections to SPPS, SPFE, and/or public education?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

I am a resident of St. Paul for the past 9 years and have been a Minn State educator for the past 9 years as well.

James Farnsworth

As a student in the district, I was a member of the advocacy group No Cuts to Kids that collaborated with SPFE on the rally at 360 in 2015 to demand that proposed budget cuts stayed out of the classroom/direct services to students and families. I graduated from Highland Park Senior High School in 2016. For the last four years, I served as the administrator of Working For A Better SPPS, a Facebook group dedicated to discussing SPPS issues. I had the opportunity to meet/exchange dialogue with many teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members as the administrator of that group.

Jamila Mame

As a Saint Paul resident, I understand that the health of my community is deeply intertwined with the health of our public school system. Through my work as a community organizer, I have invested time and energy in supporting BIPOC womxn and community efforts to create safe and sustainable schools. As an Aunt to 11 SPPS students and a mentor to 49 public school students, I understand the need to invest in our students and ensure that our students and educators are provided the institutional support that they need.

Omar Syed

Initially I was a non-English speaking student of spps. Investments of SPPS has allowed me to grow and become a successful business owner who now advocates for the community. I am also a parent of a current student of SPPS

Jim Vue

My primary connection is that of a Hmong father with Hmong children in SPPS.

b. ***What is your definition of “a public education champion”?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

A public education champion is someone that will work for change for the betterment of all students, teachers, and parents in the SPPS school community. Without this champion, voices and ideas get left behind and a more progressive educational community will not exist. This champion asks that all individuals, from parents and students to elected officials push the limits of how education should work.

James Farnsworth

A public education champion is somebody who believes strongly in public education and backs up that support by action. Whether that’s attending public schools as a student, spending time at the state legislature advocating for fully funded public education, or volunteering at a local school, it’s about showing that you value public education by taking action during a time where public education needs more champions than ever before.

As the son of two longtime public school teachers and former union stewards, I’ve grown up to strongly value public education. A strong passion for public education is in my roots as a child and former student of SPPS.

Jamila Mame

When I envision a working relationship with SPFE, I see a space where we can acknowledge that our public education has not met the needs of all our students. And, even though we have a ways to go, I see a district that invests in our students, creates pathways for marginalized students to become educators and fully funds our buildings. I am fully committed to building alongside our educators and community policies that invest in a public education system that supports all 37,000+ students in the district.

Omar Syed

A public education champion is one who is pro-public education policies. One who believes all funding should be geared towards students and that a student success which includes teacher support. A Public education champion creates policies that help kids, restore funding, request good salaries, benefits, and protections on the job for working people.

Jim Vue

A public education champion is anyone who prioritizes education in the public sector as a primary mode of enfranchisement for our students.

c. Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?

Charlotte "Charlie" Castro

I believe that SPFE has core values and ideas that are in line with mine and will allow for the School Board to work with the community to become strong partners to create the best environment for all that call SPPS home. This endorsement will validate the ideas that I have.

James Farnsworth

I'm seeking an endorsement from SPFE because teachers are the backbone of the district and during these extraordinarily difficult times, teachers need a relentless champion on the SPPS school board. I would be honored to receive SPFE's endorsement and support. I'm eager to get to work on behalf of all teachers, staff, students, and families.

Jamila Mame

As a union member, I understand the power of our collective solidarity and what is possible when we support labor and the working class movement. When I imagine a relationship with SPFE I see us working from a place where we do not have to choose between fighting for safe and supportive buildings for our students and safe and supportive working environments for our educators. I am seeking the endorsement from SPFE because I think the only way to get to a place where we are fighting for both educators and students occurs when we govern together.

Omar Syed

I am seeking SPFE because teachers, services and curriculum are the backbone of students successes. I was impacted by Spps teacher and now my child. Teachers are influential and remembered as students grow and deserve a voice in policy. Many factors play into the achievement gap, we need to understand how the support of teachers impact this gap as well.

Jim Vue

I am seeking endorsement from SPFE to begin a working relationship towards affirming public education as a primary mode of enfranchisement for our students.

d. How do you envision working in partnership with SPFE? What does that look like when we disagree?

Charlotte "Charlie" Castro

Like the community engagement that is needed, engagement with SPFE needs to occur to ensure that shared core values are expressed in our meetings, discussions, and considerations on actions that the board may consider. It is important that all voices are at the table, albeit that conversation may run longer than a set time (ie: one meeting or a comment period).

James Farnsworth

I envision a collaborative and transparent relationship, which includes strong and proactive communication. If/when a disagreement occurs, I believe in communicating directly as soon as possible to work on a solution to whatever differences may've come up. I deeply value trust, honesty, integrity, and transparency. As a school board member, I expect SPFE to hold me accountable as an elected official, partner, and ally. At the end of the day, we're all in this together for the kids and families of Saint Paul.

Jamila Mame

As an organizer, I work from a place of collective power and governing alongside communities and organizations with shared values. I see the potential to work alongside SPFE with a similar mindset. This does not mean that I assume that there will not be moments where we disagree, but I am

committed to coming to those spaces with a collaborative and restorative approach. I believe we are ultimately operating from the shared mindset that our communities and students need fully-funded and inclusive school buildings

Omar Syed

I envision a stronger relationship between leaders, unions and board members. Although, it takes time to build along the way we'll growth in trust and collaboration. As we collectively do better so will our district. Our positive outcome will measured by gains in student achievement, school climate and increase in teacher retention.

Jim Vue

I envision working in partnership with SPFE by identifying our parallel values and compassion as a means for which we act as interdependent agents for the benefit of our students. When we disagree, I challenge us to revisit these very same parallel values and compassion in order to navigate through our disagreements and towards common ground.

3. *In March, SPFE went on strike for the first time since 1946.*

a. *What do you understand to be the reasons SPFE went on strike?*

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

SPFE went on strike the Morning of March 10th for the following four key reasons; Student-Centered Proposals was not deemed urgent, Educators were not being given the resources to do their job, Systemic Racial Disparities would exist without Restorative Practices and finally the district’s priorities were not in alignment and would cause more students to fall through the cracks. The district presented a plan to roll out the proposal over 3 years and removed several support staff while also limiting support proposals to one year only.

James Farnsworth

SPFE went on strike because your top priorities were not being met by the district at the bargaining table. Those included: a fully staffed mental health team in every building, increased multilingual staff, and additional educators to support students with special needs.

Jamila Mame

From what I recall, the strike occurred in order to reallocate district funds to support students and educators. My understanding is that SPFE was pushing for greater mental health support, funding to support ESL students and providing financial support to educators.

Omar Syed

The strike was a fight for our students. It was a demand to get students and educators the resources that they needed. District funding should be student-centered.

Jim Vue

Truthfully, I understand little as to the reasons of the strike, but I am open to hear both sides in order to better answer this question in the future.

b. *What do you understand the role of the Board of Education to be in negotiations with any bargaining unit?*

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

As a School Board member, it is my direct civic duty to bring as many community members and voices into the conversation so that the Board acts in the best interest of all the children, teachers and parents that it serves. As a School Board member, I am also tasked with working with the Superintendent to ensure resources are provided to all schools, students, teachers, etc to ensure successful outcomes.

James Farnsworth

I view the role of members of the Board of Education during contract negotiations with a bargaining unit to be informed and up to speed on what’s going on, actively participate in negotiations as appropriate, and to direct and advise the Superintendent on district negotiation strategy.

Jamila Mame

I am interested in taking on a role that is proactive vs. reactive. I think that coming to conversations regarding negotiations early as opposed to when tensions are high and the ability to work together has decreased is the best way to build together. Like I mentioned above, governing together and working through tension with a restorative approach is important to me.

Omar Syed

The board of educators role is to make decisions in the best interest of students, treat people fairly and commit to being fiscally responsible.

Jim Vue

As I understand, the role of the Board of Education is to uphold the values and mission of the district during negotiations with any bargaining unit.

- c. **Will you commit to releasing the tapes from closed board sessions that relate to negotiations as soon as each unit has agreed to a new contract?**

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

I believe that it is imperative to release as much information to the public as possible so that there is transparency in the work that the School Board does for the betterment of everyone.

James Farnsworth

Yes.

Jamila Mame

Yes, I will commit to that.

Omar Syed

Transparency is key. I believe closed board sessions should be allowed for members of the board to deal with those issues thoughtfully, without pressure and public scrutiny. If upon request of SPFE and discretion of the board shall it be provided. This demonstrates that the board is dedicated to solving sensitive matters properly while still providing needed transparency for the public.

Jim Vue

At this time, I can only reason that closed board sessions are privy to the nature of negotiations in general, and unless stated otherwise, cannot be released to non-negotiating parties. Unless I am informed otherwise, I cannot commit to releasing tapes from closed board sessions.

4. *Like other districts across the country, SPPS is facing concrete challenges such as: lack of adequate state funding, increasing charter schools, and lack of resources. As part of the contract agreement, SPPS and SPFE have agreed to a statement of intent around: forming a work committee to explore seeking a PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes), coordinate efforts to seek increased funding, initiate a community impact study on the impact of charter schools in our community, and review data from families that have left the district. While COVID-19 has impacted the ability to meet and collaborate in person, SPPS has yet to take these steps.*

a. What specific steps will you take to make sure that SPPS fulfills their responsibility to meet this agreement?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

Every election cycle, there is talk of getting this committee to get this agreement put into motion and every other year nothing is done to effectively quantify the impact of funding, charter schools and to collect information from exit interviews by school families. I will work with other School Board members to put this agreement and task in place for SPPS. There needs to be accountability for what was agreed to, set up correct expectations/timelines for this process and ensure that fair and equitable information is provided to then create a plan to implement changes or adjustments

James Farnsworth

I would immediately, in collaboration with board colleagues, direct the Superintendent/district administration to take whatever steps necessary to form a diverse, representative, and inclusive task force/working group to begin this work. Every tenet of the statement of intent are things that we should be actively collaborating on and the district has a responsibility to assist in convening the group and beginning the work.

Jamila Mame

My experience as an organizer has shown me that we can take on big issues if we build a strong coalition to do so. When I see the issues above, I see the possibility to address them through fully-funding our schools and holding our big businesses accountable. I know that I don't have the ability to single handedly pass legislation to fund our schools. But, I do know that I have built relationships with community members, elected officials in the Capitol and I can leverage those to push for our shared goals. I'm interested in supporting efforts such as those and thinking through why students are leaving the district and where the money that should be going to our schools is going.

Omar Syed

With Increase of racial education and deficit, a community impact study should be a priority. I will request for the conversation this issue during our meeting. Loss of funding will continue even without the community impact study.

Jim Vue

If SPPS has not taken steps to initiate the committee, then I would identify committees with similar practice and intent that remains on going during Covid-19 within SPPS. Then, I would figure out how it is that committee is able to be maintained and try to replicate that practice through forming the work committee seeking a PILOT

b. What will your timeline be for starting a community impact study on charter schools?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

With this shortened time limit for this seat, realistically to start the community impact study a timeline of 6-12 months is realistic to get started. If elected to the School Board for a second term, the ability to see this impact study out carries much more weight. If not elected for another term on the School Board if the impact study is at least started the ability for it to finish and for results to be obtained could become a reality.

James Farnsworth

Acknowledging I don't have the full background on previous conversations or reasons why the community impact study hasn't launched yet, I will get up to speed as quickly as possible and do whatever I can to ensure a thoughtful, well designed, and culturally competent study is designed and administered in a reasonable timeframe.

Jamila Mame

This is an urgent issue for me and something I am committed to working on as soon as I am able to because I have already been in conversation with students, parents, school board candidates, current board members, and educators about this. I think working alongside other elected officials and government bodies (like the city of St Paul) is important. The disinvestment of our district hurts more than just our individual schools, it harms our city as a whole. A study would not only allow us to measure the impact of charters, but I'm interested in thinking through how we can have meaningful conversations with community members on how by investing in our public school option we can have the equitable system that we're trying to get at.

Omar Syed

September 2021

Jim Vue

Given that all communities including charter schools are affected by Covid-19, a community impact study on charter schools would be done specifically stating what affects it had on community before Covid-19 and then after. Taking into account the volatile nature of Covid-19, and how we still do not know how deep its impact on community specifically are as of yet, I cannot estimate a timeline at this point.

- c. ***What is your timeline for collecting data from families that have left the district for other districts or charter schools? What steps will you use to gather information from families that do not speak English as a first language? What is an appropriate timeline for that information to be made available to the public?***

Charlotte "Charlie" Castro

To collect data, we must start with identifying the questions we will ask families - this alone could take 2-3 months to ensure we are capturing all the information needed. Once finalized, SPPS would make this questionnaire available in multiple languages for those tracers reaching out to the families that have left. This information can be captured over the phone, through e-mail survey or at home visit. There would more than likely be a follow up period to review all information that was not returned. Information would be available in raw and analyzed format to the public in 12-18 months

James Farnsworth

Performing exit interviews, having conversations, and collecting other data points from families that have left the district is something that I've been advocating for as a student and community member for a long time. When a family announces intent to leave the district, there needs to be a robust exit strategy plan in place to authentically collect feedback from that family so we can learn and continue improving as a district. The plan needs to be fully culturally competent – utilizing translators, multilingual family engagement staff, technology when appropriate, etc.

In terms of determining a timeline – I fully understand the urgency of the issue but due to not being fully up to speed on the latest conversations and work planning, I don't have a specific, concrete suggestion for a timeline at this moment. What I can commit to is encouraging and ensuring a thorough, engaged, and efficient process. This work has already been delayed for long and is too important to wait any longer.

Jamila Mame

This is of utmost importance for me and I will start the conversation as soon as I am elected. I plan to work with school liaison, parents, community leaders, students, and educators to ensure that language is not a barrier our communities need to struggle with. I know that COVID-19 will continue

to have an impact on our district this fall, but I am committed to gathering information and being inclusive in the ways that we collect it.

Omar Syed *Candidate did not provide an answer to this question*

Jim Vue

I cannot estimate a timeline for collecting data from families that have left the district for the same reasons as for the previous question.

5. *SPPS serves a diverse population, and has been criticized heavily in the past for poor communication and lack of transparency, resulting in a loss of trust in Board members and the district.*

a. What actions will you take to rebuild trust with parents and bargaining units that communication will be timely, accurate, and complete?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

As in this campaign and my last that I ran, it is important to meet parents and students where they are – at school, through community engagement seminars/workshops and by actively being in the community. The Board Members are tasked with several responsibilities and assignments, some of which I think hinder the ability for their attention to be timely, complete yes, accurate varied. I would like to start some sort of open forum to serve and reach all the diverse populations that exist at SPPS to create the community and relationships that we are seeing with our Restorative Practices engagements.

James Farnsworth

Timely, accurate, and complete communication is essential. Full stop. For example: while the details of active negotiations can be sensitive at times, that means external communication has to be extra comprehensive and thoughtful. Through my past governance and community engagement experience, I’ve learned time after time how important communication is to *all* stakeholders of an organizations/group/institution. Communication and transparency build trust. I am completely committed to always being accessible and available myself as an individual school board member and to always push my colleagues and district administration to be as accessible, transparent, and responsive as possible.

Jamila Mame

When harm is committed, the first step is to acknowledge it. Over the years our students and schools have struggled to adequately communicate with another and we need to express that. When my family made the decision to pull me from public schools and enroll me in a charter, they did so because they felt unseen and heard by the system. How we interact with BIPOC and new immigrant communities needs to be something we center with every decision we make. When I went to a charter, I felt in community and heard, but I struggled to transition to college and graduate into the “real world”. I am frustrated that my family had to choose between a school that felt supportive and a school that would have been able to teach me the things I needed to learn to be successful. Rebuilding trust means we acknowledge the above and work to do better in the future.

Omar Syed

Our goal is to support students and community. I believe rebuilding trust and bargaining units should start with creating a committee of both directly reporting to the board. Dedicated to assisting policies and supporting a system of quality public schools that are accessible to all children.

Jim Vue

I will research why previous communication was poor, determine who was involved in the process, and evaluate what communication was given. After taking into account how effective the communication was, I will start change by adapting a new approach for myself.

b. What steps will you take to make sure that adequate and appropriate translation and interpretation services are available at all times?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

I believe that translation and interpretation services are needed for the diverse population that SPPS serves. To that end, I would work to create a translation and interpretation services bank of individuals that would allow us to reach more people either through written or spoken word.

James Farnsworth

Translation and interpretation for any party that needs those services is essential. Whether it’s for a district budget engagement session, a school PTA meeting, or any external communication coming from the district, any stakeholder should have easy access to request translation or interpretation services for any SPPS related function.

Jamila Mame

As an organizer and a member of the Oromo community, a lot of my work is based around bridging the gap between the english-speaking community and folks who struggle with that. I want to see us invest in community liaisons that share our values and I am committed to pushing for quality translation and interpretation services. When we are sending out important information to families, we need to be considerate of how we do so. Are the languages typically oral vs written? Too often materials are mistranslated or not readable and I think my experience would allow me to speak to these issues in a way others cannot

Omar Syed

I will increase general awareness. Request for incese training for parents greater community collaborations, and more IT capacity.

Jim Vue

I will research recent translation and interpretation challenges from the past. Get feedback from the people who speak those languages and assess as to how effective the translation and interpretation can become. If needed, I will bring in appropriate translators and use them to interpret as needed.

6. *Saint Paul is home to diverse communities, including many newcomers to the United States. SPPS plays a large role in helping newcomers feel welcome in their new city, while still valuing and retaining strong cultural ties.*

- a. ***How will you use your position on the Board of Education to prioritize support for English Learners, especially for newcomers and their families? What steps will you take to increase family engagement? What policy recommendations do you have for English Learners at the district level? How will you work to protect immigrant students and their families in the face of a hostile federal government?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

As a School Board Member, it is imperative that we prioritize new students to our community as well as their families. With the labyrinth of items that a student and family need to complete to enroll in school, it is necessary to have a mentorship type program or a shadow type program to get the families and students through the steps that are needed to become as engaged as they'd like in the school communities that they are a part of. I will work on the Board to create a safe space for students regardless of their immigration status and work with community resources to partner with families to allow them to obtain the education they want.

James Farnsworth

The district has a history of failing ELL students. I've seen this issue up close and personal thanks to the relentless advocacy of my friends Jane Sommerville and George Thawmoo. Thanks to their advocacy, a light was shined on some major inadequacies that existed in the district in terms of how ELL and immigrant students were being serviced.

Many of SPFE's top priorities such as a fully staffed mental health team in each building positively impact ELL, immigrant, and other vulnerable student populations the most. Especially during this time of hostility and an increasing uncertain climate for vulnerable populations at the federal level, I will do everything I can to make sure our district offers culturally competent, well-rounded supports for the students that need it the most.

Jamila Mame

One of the main reasons that I decided to run was based on my own experiences as an ELL student and my work with families of ELL learners. We have one of the most diverse school districts and yet there are students who are struggling to feel supported and thrive in their school environment. How can our families be engaged in their child's education when they struggle to understand the meaning of school policies and decisions? Increasing engagement means investing heavily in translators and a commitment to understanding the cultures and customs of diverse groups. I see an investment in BIPOC educators and educators who speak second and third languages. I am committed to being a voice on the board who can speak to the fears and struggles of our new immigrant communities and I am excited to work with them to create a more inclusive district.

Omar Syed

Every community has strengths and potential; Every community is valuable, and Every kid deserves an equitable educational opportunity. Focus should shift to figuring out which standards are priorities and how do we develop instructions that meet the diverse needs of all learners. Instead of a deficit-based approach, we need to have an asset-based approach to assessment. For example, We need a new vision of the English language learner students that recognizes their strengths of being culturally and linguistically enriched and economically diverse.

Jim Vue

As much as I can, I will surround English Learners with teachers, teacher's assistant or staff that speak their language. If there are leaders who do not speak the language, I would encourage them to say as many words in the language as they can to demonstrate that both parties are learning language from each other.

Family engagement is most opportune at the entrance points into SPPS. This tends to be ECFE or early elementary, 6th grade in middle schools and 9th grade in high schools. From there, the leadership that the family demonstrates must be supported through engagement and organizing opportunities in their schools. Finally, these families need to be recognized for the leaders that they are through school newsletter or recommendations from principals to district leadership.

I would recommend policy change to increase support staff, teacher's assistance and teachers who speak the language of the students.

I would reach out to local government leaders to build a coalition with an understanding that local government knows their communities best and are better positioned to work with immigrant students and their families from their own communities.

7. *The murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, has led to many institutions revisiting their relationship with police and policing. In Saint Paul, Black, Brown and Indigenous youth advocated for ending the SPPS contract with SROs. On June 23, 2020, the Saint Paul School Board voted to end the SRO contract. The removal of SROs is only one step in ending the policing of students.*

a. ***What is your definition of “school safety”?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

School safety is a very large topic that covers things from food insecurity, to reliable housing, access to internet, social services, medical access, school resources and support personnel to provide students with options that will allow them to be the best students they can be. When I ran last fall for school board I advocated for ending the SRO program and back filling with a hybrid model that would bring in various services and resources to the student and teaching population so that a student had the best path to success.

James Farnsworth

School safety goes beyond physical safety. Students need to feel protected, nurtured, and cared for in the building each day. This means having robust social and emotional supports in place so students can focus on learning and developing lifelong relationships within the SPPS community.

Jamila Mame

School safety is more than just the removal of SROs. It is an investment in mental health support and a move away from punitive measures. It is investing in trauma-specific approaches (such as restorative justice measures) to make sure that all our students are safe. Too often school safety is used to weaponize our system against BIPOC students and I want to approach school safety as an investment in our students and buildings. If we come into the space with a proactive approach and invest in harm reducing measures, I think we can begin to build the schools that we want.

Omar Syed

Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance use.

Jim Vue

School Safety is when the most vulnerable people in schools, the students, can advocate for their own framework of safety, the educators and principals listen and partner with the students to take appropriate action

b. ***What steps will you take to include students, families, educators, and community in policy creation surrounding school safety?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

Having open conversations with students, families, educators and community members allows for a holistic approach and also allows the process to be flexible for the vastly diverse groups and regions that exist in SPPS. I’m a firm believer that one size does not fit all school communities and as such, each school community needs to create a plan that works for their environment.

James Farnsworth

I’ve been following the board level presentations since the vote to remove SROs from district high schools. The community engagement structure around what’s next for school safety remains a little unclear to me. Knowing that this work will be well underway by the time I would be joining the board, as a current community member, I expect there to be a robust engagement structure in place that equally includes all district stakeholders and that centers the voices of those who are disproportionately impacted by the traditional models of school safety that we’re trying to move away from

Jamila Mame

The most important thing for me is to be able to sit down and have real-life conversations with community members. Too often policy decisions are shared out with language that is difficult for all members to understand and I want to make sure that anything that I lead on is centering the voices

of our most marginalized families. To the point of the school safety, we cannot lead on policy that does not have community input. Our educators and students need to be talked to frequently in both formal and informal settings.

Omar Syed

Public engagement is important for policy making. I believe we should have a committee the composes of educators, students and parents to assist in re-imagining school safety.

Jim Vue

Insight from each group must be gathered in order to better understand the intersections of school safety in regards to policy creating. After in depth engagement with each group, representatives are nominated from their own group to craft recommendations with school board directors and their superintendent. Upon crafting the recommendations, they are presented to each group by their nominated representative for revision. After revision, the representative brings the recommendation back and work with the school board directors and their superintendent to draft into a policy. Upon the final draft, the representative of each group presents the policy to their group for final revision. At this time, the representatives bring the revised final draft back and work with the school board and superintendent to draft into a policy. The policy is then presented at a school board meeting for voting in order to take effect.

c. How will you center the voices of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students in discussion of school safety?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

Students from the diverse population that SPPS serves will be included in the discussion. These schools belong to them, they should have a voice at the table and should aid in shaping what school safety looks like for them.

James Farnsworth

Centering the voices of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students in this process is essential. BIPOC students such as myself have faced tremendous inequities in our schools and communities for far too long. Creating and sustaining true systemic change requires centering and elevating the voices that have been the most impacted by the systems we need to disrupt.

Jamila Mame

As an Oromo woman, I have stepped up to provide BIPOC womxn a space where they can challenge the status quo and lean into their own power. I have also done similar work with my group the East African Development Center. I personally 49 SPPS students and work with them to think through how they can play a role in their own communities and be the change they want to see. We cannot effectively talk about important issues such as school safety if BIPOC students are not centered in the conversation. I am excited to work alongside SEAB and other students to further the engagement with district members. Additionally, my campaign is centering the voices of BIPOC students and I am proud to have a crew of folks from the district alongside me.

Omar Syed

Two Saint Paul schools with the highest suspension rates in the district together averaged a total of 312 Students suspended and 580 suspensions. Minority enrollment is 95% (majority Asian & Black) of the student body & 89% are economically disadvantaged. restorative justice should focus on these schools?

Jim Vue

Each group, students, families, educators and community provide perspective as to how they center the voices of Black, Brown and Indigenous students during the recommendations and policy revision processes. These perspectives provided by the very groups that are impacted by the policy, work to inform the school board as they vote for the policy to take effect.

d. What role should Restorative Justice play in reducing discipline and suspension disparities? Specifically, how will you partner with SPFE in creating, funding and supporting these policies?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

Restorative Justice plays a key role in creating communities and accountability in the neighborhoods where these students, parents, teachers, and community residents reside. A partnership with SPFE will allow for us to urge law makers and other policy makers to provide more funds and to reprioritize the funds available to allow for these policies to reshape our school communities.

James Farnsworth

Restorative justice centers around reconciliation which is really important, especially right now. I'd fully support ways to incorporate restorative justice techniques and best practices into the work that's happening to reimagine what school safety looks like.

Jamila Mame

We know that we reduce disparities by changing our approach. I have been encouraged by the work that has been done through trainings for educators and investment in a coordinator for the district. I hope to continue to push for efforts such as those and to include families and students in the decision making.

Omar Syed

The repetitive suspensions amongst minorities reinforces academic and racial disparities. Criminalizing school behavior not only can create a school-to-prison pipeline, but in theory also can contribute to school-to-death pipeline. I believe to reduce suspensions and achievement gap we need to invest in school based tailored programs and cultural supportive services as well as policy changes such as limiting offenses deemed suspendable.

Also a student's well-being is not the same as the next students and consists of many non-academic factors. To evaluate and understand those factors in efforts to tailor support it requires investments in preventive, trauma-informed evidence based interventions such as social workers, school counselors, mental health professionals.

Jim Vue

Restorative Justice plays an important role in re-establishing trust between student and family and the teacher and the school in the aftermath of a suspension. However, I would also invest in proactive work that identify situations that lead to student suspensions such as, strengthening teacher-parent communication about student academic performance and overall social and emotional well-being. Notification to parents as to when teachers, TA, counselor, principles, assistant principals or any staff whom the student relies upon is going to be absent as this leads to a disruption of established routines in the school. Finally, anti-racists training for teachers, TA, staff, principles and assistant principals so all school employees are accountable for their action or inaction according to their training in regards to confronting systemic racism before the student is suspended

e. SPFE has contract language for the creation of SCIT (School Climate Improvement Teams). How will you partner with us on the creation and use of SCIT in the district?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

As I view the language of the SCIT's these teams could be instrumental in helping shape what education champions are and what school safety looks like. These teams are uniquely situated since they comprise teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents and in some cases students. What better way to use these teams to help create positive school climates to be the best they can be?

James Farnsworth

The creation of SCITS at the building level seems very reasonable and straightforward. While inclusive and comprehensive district level planning is ongoing, things also look different and feel

different when implemented at the individual school levels. As a way of ensuring ongoing feedback and engagement, the creation of SCITS seems like a no-brainer

Jamila Mame

I have mentioned before that I think the only way we create policy that is truly inclusive is if the community is invested in it. To me that is both the district-wide community and the individual school buildings. Our parents, educators and students know what they need to be successful. It is important that we trust them and build with them.

Omar Syed

Candidate did not provide a response to this question.

Jim Vue

SCIT focuses on the negative behavior of students. While there must be practices that support changing a student's negative behavior into a positive behavior, I would also invest in school team building exercises, such as teacher mentorships with other teachers, principle outreach and partnerships with students' parents, rituals such as songs, dance, or sayings that build community in schools that could be created by the students, parents, teachers and staff. These collaborative practices can offset disruptive behaviors because it allows everyone in the school building an opportunity to determine what happens

8. *In 2018, SPFE joined our institutional partners in calling for elected officials to engage in co-governance and people-centered democracy. As a practice, this means engaging with your partners in all areas of public work, a willingness to be held accountable to promises, and on-going, open communication.*

a. ***What do the terms co-governance and people-centered democracy mean to you?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

This means that what you say and do, you will follow through with and along the way provide transparency for roadblocks or issues as they develop. People-Centered democracy means that those in the community work to create a better community.

James Farnsworth

Co-governance and people-centered democracy to me means transparency, accountability, and collaborative communication. As a school board member and as a governing board member in my current and past experience, relying on community partners and all stakeholders of an institution/group/organization goes hand in hand with principles of good governance. Governance can often times become an inaccessible and confusing process for many. I’m all about disrupting that.

Jamila Mame

Co-governance is a mindset that allows us to recognize that we can only work towards our shared values if we come into this space with a commitment to coming to the table authentically and with open communication. As a new elected official, I need my community to show up and share and conspire with me on what an equitable SPPS might look like. The only way we effectively work together is if we view each other as allies in our fight for a safe and supportive SPPS.

Omar Syed

Bringing people together to create a better democracy ruled by the people.

Jim Vue

These words mean a democratic governance of district operations between board members and district employees. I would push back on these terms because it is not yet made clear to me as to how parents and students are involved in this form of operations in the district.

b. ***Since 2015 there has been a pattern of behavior by a majority of board members. As candidates they engage with SPFE members to gain our endorsement and once elected do not communicate with us. Why should we expect you to be different?***

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

You honestly have no expectation that I will be different, except that I understand that at the very core of my job as a school board member my job is to work for the individuals that elected me. There are students, teachers, parents, and communities that are affected by every decision the School Board makes and without the open conversations the district will not retain individuals and it will not move towards the greatness that once was. As a Project Manager in my current role for a technology company I am responsible for all projects whether they are on time or very delayed. To that end, it is important for me to be transparent and open about the progress of the project. My question to SPFE would be, ideally, how would you anticipate those conversations to go or be conducted?

James Farnsworth

I expect to be held fully accountable for not only what I’ve stated in this public questionnaire but for my words, votes, and actions as a school board member. If communication from my end is ever lacking, call me out on it. Collaboration, communication, and accountability in governance are more important than ever

Jamila Mame

I'm not looking to be endorsed by SPFE to just get an endorsement. I understand that the way we build together is by developing a deeper relationship beyond the election and that changes how I view our work together. While I know that there will be moments where we have to work through disagreements, I'm committed to communicating with SPFE.

Omar Syed

I would like to be the champion in creating a committee of people and students to voice their opinion directly to the board and create a democracy that is centered around students.

Jim Vue

In terms of how I will approach my school board work, I will show up as a Hmong father and I will always put students and parents at the forefront. This is how I will be different.

- c. ***SPPS and the BOE have engaged in a pattern of positioning parents and bargaining unit members on committees and then refusing to act on input. What actions will you take to end this practice? What steps will you take to make sure that decisions are made with stakeholders, not for them?***

Charlotte "Charlie" Castro

Again, the conversations and the dynamic on the School Board must continue to change. While the 2015, Caucus for Change was instrumental in tilting the balance back to the community this needs to occur every time there is a school board election. There are still School Board members that campaign on listening to community members but do nothing to put those words into action and they get elected. If I am not doing my job, I want someone to call me out, I want there to be outrage. I am confident that the job of a School Board member is to put personal preference aside and work for the good of all students, parents, teachers, it has to be, there should be no other option. I will open up conversations on a variety of levels and through a variety of modalities to reach each of the seven wards – this work is not easy, but the payoff is incredible.

James Farnsworth

I've experienced this firsthand. If the district asks for the time and energy of a parent, student, bargaining unit member, or community member to serve on a committee or task force, they need to take the input of folks that participate seriously. I've seen many instances of participants who feel discouraged or frustrated and that can't continue to happen. Witnessing the repeated lack of authentic engagement is a major reason I decided to run for the board. I will do whatever I need to do to ensure that our internal and external engagement systems and processes as a district are inclusive, authentic, and yield productive, identifiable outcomes for everyone involved.

Jamila Mame

Authentic relationships with educators and families cannot be built through surveys and committees. To really listen to our parents and educators we need to invest in them and in building with them. I want to be a presence in the community and work directly with educators to address the actions that need to be taken.

Omar Syed

Civic engagement in school boards is vital to ensure that the community's needs are appropriately represented, and its goals are met.

Jim Vue

I will need to research as to why these committees were created, who participated and what input was produced. Then, I'll evaluate what action was taken and the extent of its effectiveness. From there, I will start change my modifying my practice going forward.

d. Specifically, how will you build both personal and institutional relationships with SPFE? What should the consequences be if you do not follow through?

Charlotte “Charlie” Castro

I will actively engage in conversation with SPFE members and community members on a regular basis to make sure that as many voices as possible are at the discussion table. To that end all bargaining and conversation will mean that there needs to be a give and take. As a Communication Professor, I constantly tell my students that Communication is not about convincing everyone who is listening to your argument to suddenly agree with you, it is about being willing to listen to another side and come to some ‘middle’ ground. At the end of negotiations, one side or the other should not claim victory. True partisanship comes from both sides working to do the most good. If I or any member is not making real change or transparently showing that progress is being made, then I shouldn’t be given another chance.

James Farnsworth

Building relationships and trust within governance structures is essential. I’m always open, willing, and eager to connect with folks about what’s on their mind. I believe that engagements of all sizes (1:1, small group, larger groups) can be effective in increasing collaboration and doing good work together. If for whatever reason I don’t follow through with relationship building and maintaining transparent and consistent communication and I don’t immediately recognize it myself, I’m very comfortable being called out and engaging in direct dialogue on how I can improve and be of service in the most accessible way possible.

Jamila Mame

Relationships cannot be built just during an election or when I am in office. I have been lucky to be in community with several SPFE organizers and educators through my organizing work and I come from a place where the best work is done when we invest early in one another. I don’t want our relationship to be based on transactional needs and I am excited to think through how we can really grow and build together. Should I fail to do so, I hope that we can take the space to communicate with one another and hold each other accountable in how we work together.

Omar Syed

Through civic engagement. If I don’t champion hold me accountable.

Jim Vue

I will build personal and institution relationship with SPFE by speaking to a variety of students, parents, teachers, staff and community members to get a sense of how these stakeholders interests and aspirations intersect with SPFE interest and aspirations. Where these intersections lie will determine how and to what extent my relationship with SPFE will be going forward.