



GERI DIESEL

Board Candidate (Incumbent) — April 2, 2024 Ballot

It has been my honor to serve as a teacher, administrator, and school board member for 19 years in the SG R-II School District. I grew up in Zell, graduated from SGHS in 1981, and attended the University of Missouri-Columbia for three years, majoring in elementary/special education. In 1984, as a young Lieutenant in the USAF, my husband Don was assigned to Mather Air Force Base, so we transferred there, and I completed my education at California State University in Sacramento, CA. In 1986, I obtained my first teaching position there, beginning my 24-year career in public education.

In 2004, my husband, Don, retired from active duty, and we returned “home” to Ste. Genevieve to raise our three children closer to family and hometown friends. The kids thrived at SGMS and SGHS, and I began teaching in the district. I spent eight years as a SGMS science teacher and fifth grade teacher at SGE, working on my master’s and specialist degrees from Southeast Missouri State during this time. These roles, as well as my continuing education, prepared me for becoming an administrator in the district in 2012. I completed my career in 2020 after eight years as an administrator at Ste. Genevieve Elementary, three as assistant principal and five as the principal. I was elected to the SG R-II school board in 2021 and look forward to continuing serving the best school district in the state of Missouri!

1. *What motivates you to want to become a Board of Education member?*

I am motivated to continue serving SG-R-II as a school board member because I believe a high quality education is the right of every child. I am passionate about education and SG R-II! I was born and raised in Ste. Genevieve county, my three children and I are graduates of Ste. Genevieve High School, and I have served the district for 19 years as a teacher, administrator and school board member. Students and learning have been my life's work! Having been an active and engaged member of our school district for many years, I am very knowledgeable about the board policies, mission, and workings of our school district. I stay abreast of issues facing schools today, and I hope to continue sharing my insights and experience with our community as an SG R-II school board member.

2. *What attributes do you consider to be essential for successful school board members?*

A school board must be an advocate for all students and high-quality public education. Essentials attributes include:

- Honesty & Integrity
- Dedication
- Knowledgeable
- Key Understandings of public school finance and policies
- Collaborative team player
- Open Minded
- Able to make tough decisions

3. *What is your vision for education in this community?*

My vision for education in our community is that students should always be the first consideration when determining policy. Students learn, achieve, and reach their potential in a myriad of different ways. I deeply believe that every individual has great importance in our world and it is a school district’s responsibility to provide high-quality teachers, programs, spaces, and tools to ensure that every child finds their talent and true potential. SG R-II has a rich history of success. My vision is for our district to continue this journey, growing in greatness with the traditions that have been nurtured in our school district and community. By setting high expectations and developing the essential action steps for achieving our goals, I believe that our school district can be the best in our state and a model for others.

4. *What do you see as the three most pressing issues facing public education, and what is your vision for addressing those?*

- **Funding:** Public education is funded almost entirely through public revenue. Teacher salaries, classified pay rates, transportation, student resources, high-quality facilities, and technology advancements are dependent upon it. My vision is to stay informed of funding resources and trends, and to be actively engaged in understanding how it impacts our district. I stay abreast of current legislation through Missouri School Board Association (MSBA) and Missouri Retired Teachers Association (MRTA) through weekly newsletters, webinars, monthly board meetings and attending the MSBA annual three-day conference. I am also attending Advocacy Day at the capitol in Jefferson City this April 9. Reaching out to our local legislators is the most powerful way to have your voice heard with lawmakers.
- **School Safety:** Schools are responsible for keeping students and staff safe at all times. Physical safety must be maintained through secure buildings, safe facilities & equipment, and staff training. School Resource Officers in collaboration with local law enforcement are needed to train, support, and guide the administration and staff in these efforts. Prop SG has also provided for updated entrances, cameras, locks and other features that were in great need. This is a challenge we discuss at every school board meeting and one of utmost importance.
- **Learning/Social/Emotional Health:** The 21st century has presented students and teachers with challenges that are being felt more than ever. While the isolation of Covid-19 greatly contributed to students struggling in the learning environment, I believe it goes beyond that in very complex ways. The current board recognizes the increased support that both students and staff need and continues to address this topic as well as teacher retention by hiring more teachers/paras to support students both academically and behaviorally, providing high-quality professional development, and listening to teacher/staff input regarding areas that need support.

5. *Legislation establishes state policy for education, and there are several state bills that would systematically impact public schools. To what extent would you like to be involved in legislative activity? What responsibilities do board members have regarding advocacy?*

School board members are advocates for public education and should be motivated by the best interests of all students, not special interest groups or personal relationships. I am very familiar with the extensive body of the Missouri School Boards' Association Advocacy Positions and understand the gravity of advocacy for students. Of current high-profile concerns are open-enrollment and voucher/charter school programs. For our rural area and school district size, these measures would have a negative impact on our programs. I attended nearly all MSBA virtual and in-person trainings, including this month's Lunch and Learn programs and the Spring Virtual Meeting that was held March 13 to stay up-to-date on MSBA's Advocacy positions. Again, contacting your local lawmakers is a valuable way board members and all individuals have to impact policy in our state.

6. *What do you see as our district's educational strengths, and what do you see as areas of improvement?*

Our district's motto summarizes our strengths:

Family • Tradition • Excellence! SG R-II has a rich history of success.

Our Strengths Include:

- Supportive and involved community. With the passing of the bond issue, Prop SG is bringing to life many needed safety and expansion projects that will keep our district among the best in Missouri.
- High-quality administrators, teachers and staff in place
- Excellence not only in academics, but many extra-curricular activities. From sports to a wide variety of clubs and teams, our district offers something for all students.
- Policies and programs consistently designed with student safety, learning, and growth in mind

Areas of improvement:

- Academic achievement and growth. MSIP 6 has changed the way learning is measured, and we must understand and grow with these changes. Utilizing a growth mindset to move all students forward is key.
- Classified staff salary increase to keep up with the rising cost of living
- Need for additional SRO for all buildings' safety
- Teacher salaries, retention and possible future shortages

7. *Please share your thoughts on how to provide quality education for a diverse student population. For example, this would include students who use special education services, students who are differently-abled, students who have cultural differences, students who utilize English as a Second Language (ESL) services, students who perform in the average range academically, students who utilize the gifted services, etc.*

SG R-II recognizes that “one-size” learning does not fit the wide-variety of learning needs and styles that students bring to our classrooms. As a former teacher and principal for the district, I can attest how closely the administrative team works to assess the needs of each building and provide the staffing/programs needed to support a diverse student population. Our district has added many positions over the past few years to address a variety of needs, as well as seeks out professional development for administrators and teachers to identify and put into use best practices to meet the needs of all students.

8. *What is your position in regard to both character education and social emotional learning in schools?*

I strongly support both character education and social emotional learning in schools. All four of our schools have strong programs in place to recognize student efforts and success. While I believe that structure and rules must be in place for classrooms and schools to function efficiently and productively, “meeting students where they are” is also needed at times. Teaching and learning is a delicate dance. Students are not machines, they are young human beings, and both character education and social emotional learning are pieces of their growth and development.

9. *What kind of relationship should the district and school board have with its community, including any partnerships or activities that could support student achievement outside of school?*

Ste. Genevieve has a long and rich history. Our community has many individuals that excel at farming, mining, health care, business, technology, construction, STEAM, and the arts! Community and school partnerships can work together to develop activities and events to provide students learning opportunities outside of school, from experts that live right here in our community. Student learning should not be limited to the classroom, but should also include real-life, current opportunities to flex their skills and explore vocational choices. SGHS currently has excellent vo-tech, agriculture, business and technology programs that partner with local businesses or agencies to provide students with real-life opportunities.

10. *What have you done to become informed about our District in order to prepare for your possible election to the school board?*

As a current member of the SG-RII school board, I am very aware of the existing programs, services, and policies in our district. I attend monthly board meetings as well as extracurricular activities, open houses, and other special events. I visit our schools, volunteering when I can for events such as Read Across America, semi-annual book fairs, kindergarten registration and more. I read legislative updates weekly (often daily), and I attended a recent meeting with Congressman Rick Francis. Last summer, I attended the Town Hall meeting at the SGCCC to hear Senator Elaine Gannon and Representative Rick Francis' viewpoints on current legislative issues. I have attended far more than the required training from MSBA, trying my best to take part in all virtual and in-person meetings that are offered. I visit the DESE website frequently to review our district (as well as neighboring districts) MSIP data and more. I have attended over 100 school board meetings for SG-RII over the past 12 years.

11. *How would you handle requests and/or concerns if approached by an individual or special interest group?*

A school board acts as a governing body, and my voice as an individual is only as part of the governing whole. Board members do not have the authority to speak or act individually for the district or the board. As a current board member, when I am contacted with a request or concern, I take the request/concern to the board and superintendent for discussion while adhering to the policies outlined for the district.

12. *Suppose the board made a decision you voted against, and a community member asked you about the decision. How would you handle the situation?*

A school board sets policy through a majority vote in a public forum. When the board makes a decision, regardless of how I voted on the issue, I honor this process and the decision that was chosen. I would not (and do not) discuss the way individuals voted in closed session, divulge confidential information, or express my personal opinion. Board minutes are posted publicly each month on the district website, so I have often directed individuals to this resource.

13. *Is there any other information you would like our faculty and staff, our families and our community to know about you?*

I am passionate about public education, our school district, its students and staff. I care deeply for the growth and well-being of the children in our community. It has truly been my life's work. It is through education that good citizens and future leaders are developed. Education has always been the backbone of democracy and leadership for our country. The 21st century presents new challenges; we are living in very complex times. I believe It is our schools' responsibility to provide students the tools to develop necessary critical thinking skills needed to navigate their future. As a school board member, this is my goal. Thank you for your support!