



**Local Candidate Questionnaire District 205**



**Background**

Candidate Name: **Juan Reyes**

Party: **Non-Partisan**

Office and Sub District You Are Seeking: **School Board**

Name of Campaign Committee: **Reyes for Rockford**

Education Background: **B. A. Criminal Justice Management**

Occupation, Place of Employment: **Self-employed**

Name(s) of Opponents: **Kimberly Haley**

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## Questions

1. Do you have an understanding of the District 205's current strategic objectives? Which objectives would you like to see emphasized or changed and why?

**I follow the district closely as a parent, grand-parent, and taxpayer and understand what the objectives of the district should be. Unfortunately, the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan is not available for public review at this time while it is circulating among a few. As a board member, I will make sure that it is published for all to see.**

<https://www.rps205.com/about-rps-205/strategic-plan>

**I understand the Board has declared five (5) specific "Universal Goals" including:**

- **3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Literacy**
- **3<sup>Rd</sup> Grade Numeracy**
- **Middle School on Track**
- **Freshman on Track**
- **Graduation Rate**

**These are the right measures. At the May meeting of the Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee, the Superintendent said that he [and staff] will be held accountable for achieving these goals. To that, I say very good! However, we as a community must ask, why now? Why has the Board recently determined that these areas, which the Illinois Report Card shows the District woefully failing and why now is the Superintendent saying his goals are clear?**

**I do not think any of these objectives should be changed. I do think that the Superintendent and staff need a clear messages and identifiable accountability model from the Board of Education.**

2. Attracting and retaining sufficient excellent teachers is a priority for the district. What do you think of the district's five initiatives to accomplish this (Rockford University Pathway, HBCU partnership with Central State, NIU LEAP, Aspiring Teachers, and housing incentives)? Which would you revise or emphasize?

**It is fundamental for a school district to have teachers. The teacher shortage is real and is a critical issue facing the District. I applaud the District for recognizing this. Given the severity of the issue, I do not feel the District is doing enough. For example, seven (7) cohorts of twenty (20) students are in or completed the Rockford University Pathway. While that is a success of sorts, it is less than 1% of our teacher ranks. Given the severity of the issue, I will look to scale up this program as well as the others after carefully examining which programs are working, cost efficient, and which are not.**

**While attracting new persons is important, so is retaining teachers. My focus will be on teacher empowerment in order to create a climate and culture that allows the high quality teacher to perform best. As a business owner and employer of over 40 people, I know that job satisfaction is a must have. To that end I believe teachers should be heard and respected as the 'boots on the ground' with a key point of view as well as given the tools to succeed.**

3. What do you think of the district's system of evaluating the performance of schools? How should under-performing schools be addressed?

**Only 7% of Black 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Rockford public schools are reading at grade level. Let that sink in. <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?districtId=04101205025>**

**While it is tempting to say that it is tough all over or that the children are not ready to learn, the current state is simply unacceptable.**

**The best way to address underperforming schools is to recognize what the data is telling us and then use a framework of child, parent, and process. The mission is to serve the child. How? Through Parent Empowerment and Teacher Empowerment and a process that supports and enables all parties.**

**As a Board member, I will make sure that parents are heard. Often we are told that parents are not involved enough. I found that involvement and success go up when parents have information, are regularly communicated with, and welcomed into the schools. Information about a child should not be withheld from parents. In turn, the District should consider re-deploying some of its budget into parent education programs.**

**The process is what causes and allows for action. As a Board member I will encourage our system to rest on these key principles: timely and accurate information; effective tactics and strategies; rapid deployment of resources; and, relentless follow up with personal accountability.**

4. What do you think of the district's strategy of driving funding for strategic personnel investments at schools with greatest need? How do you plan to evaluate the success of this effort?

**I have heard from community members and some around the administration that the Superintendent is using the "portfolio management" approach. I generally concur with the Superintendent in this approach. Programs and methods that are working in some venues should be copied and deployed where needed. The same should be true with principals and staff.**

**But, this latest trend in school management is sophisticated and requires an active Board with the acumen and commitment to supervise its portfolio manager and oversee a \$500 million budget and 3,000 employees. Unlike a true portfolio management model, we cannot simply close and sell off underperforming assets. So, while I support the District's general method of evaluation and investment, I will insist that it be based on data and regular accountability.**

**For example, the District spent \$160 million of our COVID relief windfall on air conditioning in all facilities. While indeed important, was that the highest and best use of those funds? Exactly how does that benefit the children, particularly those faced with trauma induced deficits effecting their readiness to learn? Did the parents, labor groups, and taxpayers get notice and give input? I believe (hope) the Board will offer rational justification for this enormous spend. As a board member, I will evaluate this spend and all actions through the lenses of child, parent, and supportive process.**

5. What will be your approach to holding yourself, the board and administration accountable? How do you define success for your potential term?

**My personal accountability rests on commitment to the principles I outlined which include reliance on data and facts free from politics and personality, communication and transparency, and parent and teacher empowerment.**

**I will work hard, attend meetings, and study the information given to the board. I will engage with students, parents, teachers, and staff. I will consistently ask for reports and follow up on small things to make sure they do not become big things.**

**There is no other definition of success for anyone involved with RPS 205 other than successful children. That means demonstrated, real, not fudged or spun, improvement in the District's Universal Goals.**

**Along the way, success for me will include increased communication with the parents and families of sub-district F. For example, 56% of the Rolling Green school population is Hispanic and I hope to better communicate with this group.**

**Success will include making sure that parents are empowered and heard. I believe there is little reason to ever withhold or deny a parent information about their child.**

**Lastly, success will include holding the line on budget and taxes.**

6. What will be your approach to making the board a cohesive and effective unit?

**My approach to working on a board is mutual respect. I acknowledge that each member represents a distinct constituency and has unique ideas. I ask that we all understand that we also serve our children, our community, and that while we collaborate with and set policy for the administration, we work for the people. As a board member, I will carry my weight, do my homework, and serve as resource for other board members.**

7. What community engagement and support do you want to see for the board and the district?

**The Board and the District must continue to expand communication. I recognize that the district has grown its media footprint with social media, improved web site, pod casts, and video interviews. That notwithstanding, I will encourage meaningful listening to parents, trade unions, and business groups like the Chamber of Commerce and manufacturers' associations especially regarding vocational training, job readiness, and employment pipelines.**

8. What strategic partnerships do you want to see created by the District?

The District cannot be successful alone, in a vacuum. Partnerships are necessary and inevitable. In my research listening to various groups, agencies, and businesses, I am disturbed to hear the refrain that “the school district is hard to work with”. While it is clear that the District has robust relationships with several outside groups, it is nonetheless concerning that so many feel partnership can be difficult. As a general admonition, the people did not elect or hire lawyers to run the schools and find ways to say “No”. On the contrary, I believe it is the obligation of the Board and staff to find ways to say “Yes” and work to solution where appropriate.

Specifically, we need the City of Rockford as a backbone partner. For example, the Superintendent said to the Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee last May that student attendance is a “crisis”. In my own sub-district at Rolling Green elementary according to the Illinois Report Card, this school’s chronic absence rate is 65%. Please read this again: Rolling Green chronic absence rate is 65%. How can we ever achieve the vaunted Universal Goals finally set by the Board and Superintendent with precious few children in the classroom? Crisis, indeed.

The City as well as its associated agencies like the Family Peace Center and Rockford Housing Authority as well as with its leadership in the social services sector must be part of a holistic solution to attendance and truancy. I realize that now reading this the administration will shout about all that it is doing. Good. It’s not enough.

As we ask other public employers to align their budgets and resources with the education of our children; so, too, must the District be open and willing to align and partner with them.

For example, recently the Mayor of Rockford answered a reporter’s question about crime with this plea, “Young kids impacted by trauma...deserve hope and opportunities. We must invest intentionally in that.” Do you see the nexus? We are talking about the same children. Truancy and attendance is a crisis and in the same moment children are identified as a driving factor in crime. This is a holy cow, wake up and smell the coffee moment. Strategic partnership is required. I would also suggest that Winnebago County should be approached too since it often feels the County does not share the same zeal for RPS 205 even though the District is completely within the County.

Other strategic partnerships should be deepened and scaled up such as Rock Valley College, the District’s dual credit program, Rockford Public Library 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy, and the academies where job training and certifications are possible.

9. What do you think are the challenges and solutions to school safety? Do you support or oppose the Rockford Police in the schools as resource officers?

**I support continued use of the Rockford Police Department as the School Resource Officer. The Board must be aware of the training and tactics being used as well as set clear expectations around strategy and goals and determine how the SROs could be used in ways beyond security.**

School safety is a complex area. As former police officer I favor “Fort Knox” to safeguard our precious ones; but, I recognize that is not everyone’s sensibility nor is it practical. Now days people think gun violence and mass shooting. Overlooked is the physical and emotional violence done between students in the halls and locker rooms—bullying. Another challenge is substance use disorders and poor mental health.

The solutions are broader than the School Resource Officer acting as paid security. The District as a whole and at the school level must continue its emergency preparedness planning. The District must not become complacent and maintain a regular threat assessment process. More important though than just fortifying our facilities are connecting quickly and directly to mental health services, setting a positive and exciting school environment and especially parent involvement.

As a board member I will not be complacent or overlook school safety. I will ask the Board and the Administration to consider school safety as a Universal Goal and develop metrics and identifiable behaviors around this fundamental need.

10. What responsibility does the school district and the school board have to the business community of Rockford? Do you feel the District is meeting that responsibility?

**No, I do not think the District is meeting the needs of the community let alone the business community since the District is failing in the basics—literacy, numeracy, and graduation rates. Of course, there is good news to report. Some children do well. Some children graduate. The academies are positive.**

Generally, we are not producing a high-quality product. In fact, the businesses I talk with have conceded the need for remedial education and simply wish RPS graduates had the soft skills necessary such as showing up on time, passing a drug test, and holding a positive work ethic.

I think the District and the Board has at least the responsibility to meet regularly with the business community to determine specific needs and issues as well as learn from the perspective of those that want to employ our graduates.

11. What is the status of student academic achievement in your District? And how can it be improved?

**The status of student achievement in sub-district F is very low.  
These are the three schools in my district:**

	<b>At Grade Level</b>	
	<b><u>Reading</u></b>	<b><u>Math</u></b>
<b>Rolling Green Elementary</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Swan Hillman Elementary</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Cherry Valley Elementary</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>18%</b>

**Improvement requires parent empowerment and teacher empowerment. I feel communication with parents, students, and staff is key. Determining what is specifically working and not working for them, on the ground, at those schools. It is important for all to remember not to confuse activity with success.**

12. What in your background leads you to believe that you would be an effective school board member?

**I am parent of children that have graduated from RPS and am a current grand parent of children in RPS. I know this district well. I have the time and the passion to serve as a board member. I own and operate businesses with over 40 employees and understand the needs around finance and human resources. I bring positive board experience as a past member of the Ken Rock Community Center where we won the Excelsior award in 2014. I served 8 years on the Shetler Care board and was elected by my fellow board member their vice-president for 4 years. I am a former police officer and current member of the Better Business Bureau Advisory board.**

**Do you Support or Oppose the Following**

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|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Oppose | <b>Year-Round Schools</b>                               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Oppose            | <b>Charter Schools</b>                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Oppose            | <b>Magnet Schools</b>                                   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Oppose            | <b>School Uniforms</b>                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Oppose            | <b>Comprehensive Truancy/dropout prevention program</b> |