



## Local Candidate Questionnaire District 205



### Background

Candidate Name: **Jude Makulec**

Party: **Independent**

Office and Sub District You Are Seeking: **Sub-District D**

Name of Campaign Committee: **Citizens to Elect Jude Makulec**

Education Background:

**Emory University, Atlanta, GA— Master of Physical Therapy, 1981-1982**

**Philadelphia Institute for Paralegal Training, Philadelphia, PA — Paralegal Certificate, 1978-1979**

**University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign— Bachelor of Science, Therapeutic Recreation, 1974-1978**

Occupation, Place of Employment: **Founder and Principal Therapist, Jude Makulec Physical Therapy (Rockford, IL)**

Name(s) of Opponents: **Nicole Bennett**

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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?

**The current objectives for the District include (but are not limited to) the System Wide Framework, Talent Development, Equity Initiative, Early Childhood Expansion, International Baccalaureate (IB) Expansion, and Facilities Plan Development.**

**I would emphasize System Wide Framework as it directly connects to accountability for student achievement. The System Wide Framework consists of two key components: the District holding schools accountable for doing their work (e.g. using the defined curriculum and otherwise following standards of practice) and the school administrators providing feedback on the ways the central administration is creating a supportive environment. The potential in the System Wide Framework is one of the reasons I've centered shared accountability for student success in my platform as a candidate.**

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?

**The five initiatives to support attracting and retaining excellent teachers have created a pipeline to increase our teaching staff; each program addresses a different part of our retention and recruitment puzzle, from Aspiring Teachers that allows student teachers to be paid for their training time in the classroom with the potential to have them continue to teach in the District to housing incentives that pay for 10% of a home purchase price (up to \$10K per teacher) to encourage our teachers to live in the community they serve, with many teachers who have used the program – an investment of over \$762K in our teachers and real estate in our community since FY2017, with almost \$90K invested in FY2023 alone.**

**Looking forward, I would emphasize and seek opportunities to scale the NIU LEAP program which allows any non-certified staff in the district (including secretaries, bus drivers, nutrition, and paraprofessionals) to complete a teaching degree with full tuition coverage. The staff in this program are already invested in RPS205 schools and students. It provides the most immediate development of teaching staff, filling the continuing void the district has for special education teachers.**

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

**The two way evaluation provided by the System Wide Framework is a great tool. Having schools evaluate central administration under Standards of Service tells the board if schools are being provided what they need for teachers to succeed. Standards of Practice then allows for consistent evaluation of the schools implementation of district initiatives and curriculum with performance evaluation. Underperforming schools should initially be provided increased oversight and structure. If those are unsuccessful, reorganization of the school would be next. The new International Baccalaureate school at Conklin is an example of what can be done to revive a failing school.**

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?

**This strategy is a positive demonstration of the District's Equity Initiative which has already proved successful. Haskell was first to take advantage of increased funding for strategic personnel and their literacy scores rose 20%. The success of the increases in per pupil spending at schools with the greatest need will be evaluated by increases in achievement in literacy, math, secondary students on-track and graduation rates.**

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

**As an elected governing body for the Rockford schools, the Board is ultimately accountable to our constituents, with a focus on making decisions that are in service of continued improvements within the Rockford Public Schools.**

**Each year, board members complete an annual self evaluation that should continue; the exercise allows the board to evaluate how the board is collaborating, identify pain points, and agree on better ways to work as a board. This includes revisiting the effectiveness of committee structure which is core to the overall organization of our decision making and activities. In addition, we should continue the annual Superintendent evaluation with measurable achievement goals.**

**Success during my term would be measured by meeting the superintendent goals for student achievement that reflect the many investments and innovations we're trying in our schools. Those targets include a 5% increase in 3rd grade literacy and math on the state standardized test, 5% increase in middle and high school on track, increase graduation rate to 75%, decreased teacher vacancies, increased percentage of staff of color, and an increased substitute teacher fill rate.**

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

**The school board brings together community members with different perspectives and ideas about how we best support our students - and our strength as a group is best realized when every member has the opportunity to share their perspectives and is respected, even in the case of disagreements on an approach to a challenge or growth opportunity. An inclusive communication strategy is key to creating that environment of psychological safety among the Board itself, and in working to earn the trust of our community including our administrators, students, staff, and community members.**

**Functionally, this requires aligning on our shared expectations around how we collaborate. From my experience, the Board is more cohesive if all members have the same information and have ongoing 1:1 conversations about initiatives outside the structured meetings, which I would continue to engage in and support if re-elected.**

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

**My biggest aim would be for increased board presence at community meetings and events, creating more opportunities for engagement between school leadership (including the Board and central administration), our constituents, and the community groups across Rockford with a vested interest in strengthening our public schools.**

**In addition, I would support the development of a District wide Parent Council with representation from all schools (or at least all quadrants) meeting monthly with the superintendent and a rotation of board members - this is a structure the District used to have and I participated in as a parent more than two decades ago with great potential to increase the knowledge sharing and listening opportunities between leadership and parents.**

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

**I'd invest in partnerships that focus on increasing and enhancing partnerships with community businesses and RVC through Career Readiness, which connected to the high school Academy pathways that we've introduced over the last decade; investing in vocational coaches for students currently employed in local businesses to strengthen their professional skills in preparation for new opportunities; and building out RVC's Stenstrom Center for career training.**

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?

**Inside our buildings, we need to continue to provide professional development and mentoring to our staff around how and when to intervene in intra-student conflicts, and to ensure schools are appropriately staffed to manage incidents. We also need to provide additional layers of support and safe spaces for students experiencing behaviors.**

**As part of our ongoing facilities plan, we've made physical changes to our buildings, including locked vestibules to monitor who is entering and exiting our schools. We've also added electronic monitoring inside and outside our buildings, and on all of our buses. Looking forward, I would support efforts to complete the build out of all buildings secured entrances with vestibules and continue to upgrade alarm systems for open doors.**

**I support school resource officers in the buildings and would like the district to work with the police department to fully staff our schools in accordance with their contract.**

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?

**Our schools must graduate young adults who are employable or college ready, and we welcome opportunities for our graduates to find successful career paths here in Rockford. To succeed, the district will need the support and partnership of additional businesses as part of existing initiatives around career preparedness.**

**I believe we've made substantial progress towards that goal through the programs developed over my past decade on the board. Our students have made progress toward those career aspirations with Academy Pathway Certifications and RVC Career Running Start. College Readiness has increased with a rise in dual credit offerings, increased AP classes taken by students, and counseling students with scholarships, especially Rockford Promise.**

**The board also has the responsibility to continue to maintain a balanced budget while holding the line on the levy - which has not increased in the past decade. In addition to our responsibility for providing excellence in education for our students and families, we're accountable to businesses to be fiscally responsible in how we manage our District's finances and be mindful that taxes make an impact on people choosing to call Rockford home as potential employees and customers of local firms.**

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

**Achievement based on standardized testing remains low. However, due to our hybrid model of in person and remote learning during the pandemic, we experienced less of a decline in IAR (state test scores) than was seen in average state scores for third grade literacy and math. Additionally, the number of Freshman on track to graduate rose during the pandemic. Continued improvement rests on successful implementation of the System Wide Framework for accountability and understanding where the district is getting the best academic return on their investments.**

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

**Before I was a school board member - starting in 2009 - I was part of RPS205 as a parent of three children who went to school in our district, as a physical therapist working with children often learning in our special education programs, as a local business owner of my own physical therapy firm, and as a community member. I continue to bring those perspectives to my decision making on the Board, in addition to my years of service as an elected official.**

**For fourteen years I have served effectively by being prepared, maintaining open lines of communications with other board members, administration and schools, and holding the superintendent accountable with defined and time-boxed goals. As a former principal said, I "do my homework" when it comes to my work on the board, and I dedicate a great deal of time outside of the formal meeting structures to gather information, listen to constituents, and seek opportunities to continue to strengthen the education provided by our schools.**

**My platform as a candidate this year focuses on shared accountability for student success, fiscal responsibility where our spending reflects priorities in service of our students' success, and college and career preparedness for all starting in early childhood through high school. I have a proven track record of collaboration towards these goals from my years of service, and welcome the opportunity to grow the programs that we've started in recent years that are now having an impact.**

**In a time when there's enthusiasm for new voices in leadership - which I wholly welcome - I also believe**

that stability is not the status quo, and the Rockford Public Schools will be best supported by a school board that includes experienced board members and new voices.

**Do you Support or Oppose the Following**

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