

Dane County Democratic Party Candidate Questionnaire

Francis (Frank) Sullivan
Stoughton Area School District Board of Education
<https://www.facebook.com/SullivanforStoughton>

Professional Experience:

Assistant Attorney General, State of Wisconsin 2005-present

Political/Service Experience:

Stoughton Area School District Board of Education, 2013-15, and
2018-present (Board president 2018-present)

Why Are You Running In This Election?

In addition to the challenges posed by Covid, our district continues to face significant long term challenges. Our reading scores are not where they should be, especially for students of color. Our enrollment continues to decline as our community ages. And Covid has exposed our inequities and resource gaps and made them crueler. We were making some steps at transformation before Covid; I want to lead us out of Covid and get us back on track.

What Are The Three Most Important Issues In Your Race?

(1) Even before Covid hit, Stoughton's reading scores were inadequate. Over our entire population, about half of our kids are reading at or above grade level. For students of color, the number was much lower. (2) Stoughton is a historically white community that has struggled to serve students of color. We are beginning a community discussion about race and equity, but we have a long

way to go in terms of building a welcoming climate for students of color. (3) Stoughton has struggled long-term with declining enrollment as our community ages. We have to figure out how to address the pending funding crunch, likely through referendum.

What Are The Largest Environmental Concerns You Aim To Deal With In Office?

As part of its 10-year facilities plan, the District is looking at energy efficiencies that include potential consideration of solar energy sources.

How Will You Use Your Position To Create More Equitable Opportunities And Help Those Living In Poverty?

Historically, Stoughton has struggled to hire and retain non-white teachers and other educational staff. It has become clear that our community is perceived as inhospitable to people of color; it also has become clear that this perception is correct. We are getting our own house in order -- pushing our educational staff to welcome and celebrate students of color and make it clear that ALL families are welcomed and celebrated in our community. When Covid hit, we recognized the inequities inherent in on-line learning for students who have poor internet access, limited family support, and food insecurity. We made sure every student had technology and knowledge of how to use it. We distributed hotspots so every student had internet access. Our social workers and other staff identified students in need of support and got them support. And we re-purposed our bus drivers to deliver meals to every family in the district that asked for them, whether they fit the poverty guidelines or not.

How Do We Address Racial Inequality?

Slowly, with a recognition that the bulk of the work to address racism by white people must be done by white people. In the

schools, that means that we have to make sure that all voices are heard, all students feel safe, all families feel welcome, and everyone has access to learning that's delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.

How will you promote restorative justice and address abusive and racist practices by the police force?

This is not really a school issue. Our district's SRO contract lapsed in summer 2020. We have not renewed it.

Due to the ongoing economic impact of Coronavirus, many local governments are expecting unprecedented budget shortfalls. What would you prioritize in the budget? Where would you make cuts?

Because of our declining enrollment, we are already experiencing budget shortfalls. We will have to trim \$1.5 million off our 2021-22 budget. Eighty percent of our budget goes to staffing costs, and the reality is that we will have to make staffing cuts.

How have you elevated diverse voices in government and public discourse? How would you continue to do so if elected to this office?

We are taking baby steps. Eight of our nine board members are white, a distribution that roughly matches our district's population. Our community's history of elevating diverse voices is not strong. When our board met in person, we invited our students of color to speak to use and engage in a frank conversation about their experiences, and we plan to continue to do that. We are leading a community conversation on race, but we recognize it's the first of many steps.

What Are The Largest Transportation Issues You Wish To Work On And How Will You Address Them?

Our only transportation issue is busing. Social distancing requirements mean we can accommodate fewer children, so in-town families are struggling to find alternative ways to get their children to and from school.

Any Other Issues/Topics You Wish To Discuss?