

Johnson County Public Policy Council
2020 Kansas State Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Melanie Haas

Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

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Occupation/Work History (last 5 years – 25 words or less): *Technology and MarTech consultant, software engineer and leader, most recently employed full-time at DST Systems as an Engineering Manager from 2016-2017. (Full background on [LinkedIn](#))*

If you are or have been affiliated with a chamber of commerce or other business organization, please list which organization(s) and any leadership positions you have held: *Past member of Central Exchange with service on their WiSTEMM committee.*

Other recent political/community experience? (25 words or less)

I support STARTLAND as a mentor with their MECA program: entrepreneurship introduction for high schoolers. I also have a long history as a community builder and connector in the tech/startup space in Kansas City.

As a candidate, what are your top three policy issues? (10 words or less per line)

1. Maintaining adequate funding for Kansas public schools
2. Health and safety as we work to return to schooling during a pandemic
3. Modernizing the curriculum offerings in our schools to bolster tomorrow's workforce

The State Board of Education is implementing "Kansans Can," a student-focused vision for education with aggressive goals for kindergarten readiness, high school graduation, and success in postsecondary education or workforce readiness. What are your thoughts on the "Kansans Can" school redesign? (75 words or less)

I love everything about the Kansans Can Redesign Project. Students and teachers have suffered under a one-size-fits-all model where, for decades they focused on "teaching to the test" as a success measure. This project turns that on its head and makes social-emotional learning a priority while encouraging students to design their own path forward. I especially appreciate the focus on tech skills and real-world learning to truly engage and inspire students.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Kansas schools to find new ways of serving students. What do you believe should be the takeaways from this experience? (75 words or less)

Sometimes we spend too much time planning and aren't quick enough to start executing. In March, schools had little warning before the shift into remote learning mode. Moving forward this experience should spur us to be more creative, more experimental and daring. Perfection in a

pandemic is impossible - I'd like to focus on making great progress through innovative concepts and teamwork.

How control over education decision-making is divided among the Legislature, SBOE, and local school boards has been a matter of debate. What are your views on this issue? (75 words or less)

Local control is a good thing. What works for school districts in Johnson County may not be right for those in rural areas and vice versa. Allowing each district to make their own decisions is key to meeting unique needs. The state board and KSDE provide guidance but not steadfast rulings, which allows for greater autonomy and balance. I believe strongly that we should look to public health officials and professionals for Covid-19 guidance.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge currently facing the State Board of Education? (75 words or less)

I think the biggest challenge is that "school" as we now it has now been changed dramatically by the pandemic. There's now a greater understanding that a classroom isn't required for teaching and learning. Remote instruction has added a layer of complexity that districts weren't prepared for, but now they are living it and iterating through. Moving forward, technology decisions will be a big part of education practices.

Why are you seeking this public office? (50 words or less)

I believe in individualized learning methods where students follow their own path and pursue projects that interest them. The goal should be to create lifelong learners and stop trying to force kids down a predetermined path. I believe that my background in technology can aid these efforts.

What do you think most distinguishes you from your opponent(s)? (50 words or less)

The fact that I fully support our public schools and want ALL Kansas students to have a world class education. My kids actually attend public schools. My stepmom was a teacher and I have an extensive history of working with teachers and volunteering with students, intersecting with my tech career.