



A **non-partisan** resource to give Nebraska voters the **information they need** to make an informed decision when voting. A non-edited opportunity for candidates to state their position **in their own words**, online for **free**.

## LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS – District 2

### Connie Duncan

Party: Republican

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/connieforschools>

### Rachel Terry

Party: Republican

Website: <http://vote4rachelterry.com/>

Note: Usually we provide responses all on one page, but to save space, some topics cross pages.

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### (Contact Information) - Details of when we inputted the candidate's responses, including attempts to establish contact and other communication.

**Connie Duncan** 3/10/15 – after not finding home phone number, left message at husband’s business. 3/10/15, evening, candidate returned call. 3/10/15, 10pm, questionnaire emailed. 3/11/15, candidate email said, “I will get this done this week.” 3/13/15, 9am, candidate returned call – said would try for Monday. 3/18/15, 11am, left phone message. Answers copied from email response received Wednesday, March 18, 2015 7:55 PM.

**Rachel Terry** 3/5/15, Spoke with candidate, emailed questionnaire, Answers copied from email response received Sun, 8 Mar 2015 8:01pm

### (Biographical) - Please include biographical information , e.g. family members, church affiliation, employment, etc. you consider important for voters to know and/or reference your website. (continued next page)

**Connie Duncan** I was born and raised in Lincoln, Ne. I attended Sheridan Elementary School, Irving Middle School and Lincoln Northeast High School .I am married to my high school sweet heart Todd Duncan and we have twin 20-year-old boys. Harrison attends Nebraska Wesleyan University, where Todd and I both graduated and PK attends California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks California. I was a Special Education teacher for 17 years for LPS and a Retention Specialist for the Learn to Dream Program at Southeast Community College the past 5 years.

**(Biographical) - Please include biographical information , e.g. family members, church affiliation, employment, etc. you consider important for voters to know and/or reference your website. (continued from previous page)**

**Rachel Terry** My husband Ben and I have three fantastic kids, all of whom currently attend LPS schools. I have a B.A. in English, and I've worked as a writer for the past 17 years. I've written fiction and non-fiction books, magazine articles, web content, literary guides for classroom use, and homeschool curriculum. I've also worked in the publishing industry as a managing editor and acquisitions editor for a small publishing house in Denver, CO. In the past I've tutored in university writing centers, and I currently tutor for Lincoln Literacy.

**(Motivation/Qualifications) - What has motivated you to seek this office? What do you hope to accomplish? What three qualifications do you bring to this office?**

**Connie Duncan** I feel that I will bring an educator's background as well as a long time community volunteer to the Lincoln School Board. I have worked with students with special needs my entire career as well as in the community at the Boys and Girls Club. I understand our diverse students and the needs they come to school with on a daily basis. I hope to make our after school programs stronger with more emphasis on STEM subjects and healthy lifestyles. I also hope to enlarge our Early Childhood Programs so that all students start kindergarten at a similar level. The three qualifications I bring to the office are: A teaching background, strong community advocate for all children, life- long resident of Lincoln, Ne.

**Rachel Terry** I hope to represent the citizens and parents of Lincoln whose voices are marginalized by the current Board of Education. After scores of parents turned out to school board meetings in the fall, it soon became apparent that the school board and district administration was only interested in listening to people who supported their own ideas. Also, I learned that many recent school board races have been uncontested. I hope that by running for school board I can help the public to become more interested in what's going on in K-12 education in our community.

**(Checks and Balance) – According to LPS School Board Policy #6400, "The Superintendent, with involvement of the community and instructional staff, shall develop and periodically update a statement which reflects the community's purposes for its schools." How do you view the check and balance relationships between the superintendent and the school board? How do you picture representing the interests of the public if they differ with the superintendent?**

**Connie Duncan** The Lincoln School Board's role is to make policy. The Superintendent's role is to implement policy. My role as a school board member is to listen to the parents, teachers, and students and bring these opinions back to the Lincoln School Board. As an individual on the school board I do not have direct authority, but as a board we do.

**Rachel Terry** In representative democracies such as ours, voters elect representatives to share their thoughts and concerns and make sure their voices are heard. This past October, we saw board members refusing to answer phone calls and emails to their constituents while standing behind the superintendent as one united front. Board members have an obligation to relay information from citizens to the superintendent and ensure that the administration provides education that "reflects the community's purposes for its schools." As I have spoken with members of the community I've found that nearly everyone agrees that schools should focus solely on academic achievement, but this message doesn't seem to be getting through.

**(Common Core) - Discuss your thinking on Common Core. Should Nebraska “sign in”? Should schools use the curriculum anyway?**

**Connie Duncan** So far, there is no research to say that the application of these standards ensure that every child will graduate from high school, college and/or career ready. I do not want to see Nebraska “sign in”. All of our schools in the state are not the same and certainly not the same as our schools in Lincoln.

**Rachel Terry** I believe that students are best served when decisions are made by those who work closest to them. The federal government is far away and requires too much bureaucratic oversight to be effective on the local level. Curriculum decisions should be made by those who work closest to the students, and what works well at one school may not be what works best at another school, even within the same district.

**(Purpose of Ed) - What do you consider the purpose of public education to be? What non-academic activities should schools promote?**

**Connie Duncan** The purpose of Public Education is to educate and meet the needs of ALL students. Unfortunately, because of No Child Left Behind teachers are now pressured to spend every available minute to improve test scores. I believe we need to get back to the classes of physical fitness, art and music.

**Rachel Terry** The purpose of public education is to provide citizens with the education necessary to be self-reliant. Self-reliance requires a level of critical thinking and fundamental academic skills that give students options to pursue whatever course they feel compelled to follow. I have a great appreciation for the arts, music, and athletics, but these non-academic activities should be secondary to a rigorous academic education.

**(Literacy) - Describe what you would recommend to increase the quality of literacy in graduates of LPS.**

**Connie Duncan** The problem stems from the fact that not ALL children come to kindergarten at the same academic level. We first need to increase our programs and effectiveness of our Early Childhood Programs so that we start children at a similar level in their educational career. Next we need to work to close the achievement gap immediately in the Elementary and Middle School years. Our schools will need to focus on the students individually by using programs such as Reading Recovery. Our After School Programs will need to also work to close the achievement gap by providing more one on one tutoring and STEM activities. Our Community Learning Centers will need to provide more tutoring over the summer to stop the summer brain drain. Children of poverty lose 2-3 months of reading skills learned in a school year, whereas students of middle class families make slight gains in reading skills. For many of our students in Lincoln, they do not have access to books over the summer and their parents are working all summer to pay the bills. That is why Community Learning Centers/afterschool programs are so important for our children.

**Rachel Terry** University English departments have become the homes of special interest disciplines with programs like Women’s Studies and Ethnic Studies. While there’s nothing wrong with studying these fields of literature, the unintended consequence is that the graduates of these programs begin teaching in the middle schools and high schools and focus their teaching on these special interests instead of on fundamental grammar, vocabulary, classic literature, and critical thinking and research skills. Middle school and high school writing assignments tend to be self-focused (“What do you think about the voting age?”) instead of analytical (“Compare the roles that Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams play in The Crucible”). A lack of critical thinking skills (replaced by constant introspection) can have a lasting negative impact on our society’s ability to think through important issues. In order to increase the quality of literacy in graduates of LPS, teachers need to focus more on fundamental grammar, vocabulary, classic literature, and critical thinking and research skills.

**(Property taxes) - The overwhelming sentiment during the governor’s race was that property taxes in Nebraska are too high. Yet there is little to nothing a governor or the state can do about high property taxes. Do you think the office you are running for could manage a property tax cut? If so, what items?**

**Connie Duncan** This is something I am willing to look into and get feedback from the community of Lincoln. My understanding is that if we lower our levy from \$1.05 to \$1.04 we can still receive state aid. As a school district we need to be aware that the number of students we have in the district calculates state aid. If our enrollment drops then we will not only get less state aid, but less of our share of property tax. It is something that as a community we need to research and make a collective decision.

**Rachel Terry** The levy rate could be lowered from 1.05 to 1.04 without causing a reduction in state aid, and this should be done right away to reduce the property tax burden on Lincoln taxpayers. Beyond the levy rate, state reform may be necessary to make any significant reductions in property taxes. TEEOSA is so complicated that school boards and administrators have understanding what the outcomes will be of adjustments to their budgets. Bottom line is that many schools across the country are producing equal or better educational outcomes for less money than we’re doing in Lincoln, so there’s plenty of room for improvement.

**(Non-public school students) - To what extent should home school, private school, charter school students have access to public school academic or non-academic activities (e.g. sports teams, musicals, clubs, advanced classes, etc.)?**

**Connie Duncan** I do not have a problem with any student in the city participating in non-academic activities. They are taxpayers as well and should have access to anything our public schools offer. However sports teams are governed by Nebraska Sports Athletic Association and that is something the school board cannot control.

**Rachel Terry** All property owners pay taxes to support educational opportunities for the youth in our community, so all youth should have access to these resources.

**(Science Debates) – Discuss your thinking on the responsibility of teachers to present opposing views in scientific debates such as evolution and/or climate change.**

**Connie Duncan** Teachers are responsible to give accurate facts from all viewpoints.

**Rachel Terry** If an issue arises about which our community has not come to a consensus, then parents should be notified about the topic and materials before it’s discussed in class. In regards to scientific topics, there is more than enough to learn that has been proven by means of the scientific method; I think it’s wise to stick with this material.

**(Religious Freedom) - Should Muslim students have freedom to pray at specified times? Should Christian students have freedom to pray in public? Should those without a specific religion be free to cancel other religious practices?**

**Connie Duncan** I do not believe religion should be a part of the public education. It is my understanding that any student can pray in school as long as they do not interrupt the learning environment.

**Rachel Terry** Freedom of religion is not the same as freedom from religion. Students and teachers shouldn’t feel that they have to hide their religious beliefs, but teachers should not endorse a particular religion. Students should be able to pray if they want to, as long as classroom instruction is not interrupted.

**(Americanism) – According to the Nebraska state statute 79-724, most recently amended by LB544, in 2011, known as the Americanism Statute, every school board shall appoint a committee of three members with seven enumerated responsibilities. If you were appointed to serve on that committee, what actions would you take?**

**Connie Duncan** I would review the statute and compare it to current practice and if the enumerated responsibilities were not being met I would work to change our practice to comply with the statutes. This is a committee that you would serve on. I believe that one of our most important things about our school system is to make us Americans.

**Rachel Terry** I would write a resolution to the College Board asking that they rewrite their new AP U.S. History curriculum so that Nebraska students can still enjoy the benefits of AP U.S. History without having to deal with two conflicting textbooks and a highly politicized curriculum.

**(Parents) Some parents want to tell teachers what to do. Some parents feel they are not included enough in what's going on in school. Some parents, evidenced by their behavior, prefer to let the teachers/administration do parenting. Discuss what your role as a board member should be in dealing with the resulting tensions.**

**Connie Duncan** I will listen to all parent's viewpoints and take this information back to the board for further discussion. Not all children are raised the same way. Parents have the right to raise their children the way they believe is correct. I do believe that teachers should notify parents about controversial issues so parents can decide if their child should participate.

**Rachel Terry** Transparency can help to alleviate many of these problems. The school board can write and follow up on policies that will increase transparency to strengthen the relationships between parents, teachers, and administration.

**(Accommodation) – What accommodation should be made for individual students with unique needs, e.g. autism, high achiever, transgender, religious minority, non-English speaker, etc.?**

**Connie Duncan** Children that fall in the autistic category have an IEP that states their accommodations and is approved by a team of teachers, administrators and their parents. Children that are high achievers have a similar plan in which they are tested and accommodations are made. ELL students are also tested and given accommodations according to their level of understanding the English Language. The above students with unique needs are based on academics. Transgender and religious minority students do not have academic unique needs. I believe these students need to be addressed on an individual basis with their teachers and parents.

**Rachel Terry** Accommodations should be geared toward helping students to reach greater academic success. Some students will need extra help or special accommodations in order to succeed, and these accommodations should be handled in a sensitive way. The goal should be self-reliance, as much as is possible for each student. For example, my younger sister has a condition called William's Syndrome. Some of her teachers didn't want to push her because they thought she would be frustrated, but through the insistence of her parents, she received a solid academic education. She has been able to volunteer, hold jobs, and live on her own as a result of her ability to read, write, and communicate well. Students should not be taught that their needs are greater than the needs of other students around them. Mutual respect should be taught from the earliest ages.

**(Sexuality issues) – Some consider it discrimination on the level with race or ethnicity to speak against homosexual behavior. Some view discussion of any sexual behavior, whether same-sex or not, as inappropriate for discussion in school. Some want textbooks, reading books, curriculum to present both views as equal. Some want parents to be informed when such discussions are happening so they can opt their children out. With which group’s philosophy do your most closely agree, and why?**

**Connie Duncan** I believe that teachers should only provide age appropriate facts about sexuality issues. Teachers must ensure that all parents are aware of the information ahead of time so parents have time to opt their child out of such discussions.

**Rachel Terry** I think parents should be informed when discussions of sexual behavior take place so the parents can decide whether or not their children should participate. Parents may have a variety of reasons for keeping their children out of such discussions: maturity, previous sexual abuse, religious beliefs, family issues, and more. School administrators and teachers can’t possibly know all of the issues individual children are facing, and when they veer away from academic subjects and take on social and moral issues, they risk causing unnecessary distress to some or all of their students.

**(Abortion-schools) – Even though many voters would like to know your personal position on the abortion issue, for this race, would you support Planned Parenthood presenting in the schools? What impact on academic and/or social behavior have you observed for young women (and associated young men) who have abortions?**

**Connie Duncan** I do support Planned Parenthood providing the accurate facts to students. However, I believe parents must be told ahead of time so they can opt their child out of such discussions. I do not know anyone that has had an abortion so I cannot accurately answer that question.

**Rachel Terry** No, I don’t support Planned Parenthood presenting in the schools. When children face difficult decisions regarding abortion, their parents are in the best position to help them.

**(Personal story) - Please briefly describe a situation where you had to stand alone for what you thought was right when the momentum was pushing the other way. What was the result?**

**Connie Duncan** In high school at Lincoln Northeast I was a member of the band and orchestra. Most students at our high school were big drinkers. There were many situations in which I could have gone to parties and been just one of the drinking, high school kids. I had decided when I started high school that my music career was very important and I needed a college scholarship to attend college. Because of this I made the decision for me to take the path that was best for my future college plans.

**Rachel Terry** I have had to stand alone several times when my children’s schools have presented materials that I considered an unwise use of their school time. As a result I’ve been accused of bigotry, called names, and threatened with a lawsuit. But in my experience, you don’t have to stand alone for long. Hundreds of people have contacted me, stood beside me, and said, “We feel the same way.” Sometimes you just have to stand alone long enough for others to see that they’re not alone either.

**(Decision making) - To whom/what will you go for counsel in decision-making?**

<b>Connie Duncan</b>	I will talk first with my husband, then my sisters and family members and my close friends. They are my support group. I will also talk to students, teachers and parents of our community. As a member of the school board I will represent the entire city, not just District 2.
<b>Rachel Terry</b>	I would go to the people of District 2 to find out how they feel about the issues that will affect them and their children.

**Declare anything else you want voters to know about you.**

<b>Connie Duncan</b>	I am a very responsible decision maker. Before I make any decision I find out what I can from people who are experts. I spend a great deal of time talking with community leaders, parents, students, teachers and faith based leaders. I do not make a decision until I have analyzed everything and have the accurate facts.
<b>Rachel Terry</b>	When it comes to making decisions about public schools, I think the following question should always be asked: Will this improve educational outcomes? If not, we have no business spending precious time and resources on it.