



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 6

Katie McLeese Stephenson

Party: Democrat
 Website: <http://www.katiemcleesestephenson.com/>
 See also www.votersnap.com

Matt Schulte

Party: Republican
 Website: www.voteschulte.com
 See also www.votersnap.com

Note: Order of reporting responses may vary according to best space needs.

Questions Key:

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Contact Information | Property Taxes | Sexuality issues |
| Biographical | Non-public school students | Abortion Schools |
| Motivation/Qualifications | Science Debates | Personal story |
| Checks and Balance | Religious Freedom | Decision making |
| Common Core | Americanism | Anything else |
| Purpose of Ed | Parents | |
| Literacy | Accommodation | |

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson	Thu, 26 Mar 2015 5:44pm, questionnaire emailed to both candidates. 3/27/15 responded to say she had received the questionnaire. 4/10/15, 7:370pm, reminder call, candidate reported family member hospitalization. Aim for Tuesday. Reminder email 4/14/15, 11am. Wed, 15 Apr 2015, 11:06pm, extending to the weekend. Answers copied from email response received 4/19/15, 10:12pm
Matt Schulte	Thu, 26 Mar 2015 12:13pm, candidate emailed to request the questionnaire. Thu, 26 Mar 2015 5:44pm, questionnaire emailed to both candidates. Reminder email 4/14/15, 11am, Answers copied from email response received Wed, 15 Apr 2015 08:43am.

(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 on next page)

Matt Schulte My wife (Kristin) and I have four young children. I was born in Lincoln where I attended Maude Rousseau elementary school. Eventually I graduated from Grand Island Senior High. I had such a positive public school experience that I went on to get my undergraduate degree in Middle School Math and Science. Additionally my wife was a teacher for 9 years in a public school as well as an educational consultant for several years. I currently serve as the director of Campus Life. We work very closely with LPS to come alongside teens through before and after school programs.

(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)

**Katie
McLeese
Stephenson**

I have lived in Lincoln since 1969 when my family moved from Glen Ellyn Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago. I attended Morley and then Lincoln East 7-12. In high school I began my love for social work as a mentor for the Big Brother/Big Sisters organization. I was also active on the Varsity Tennis Team 10-12, Varsity Cheerleader and the yearbook staff. I graduated with honors from Nebraska Wesleyan University with a Bachelor of Science degree from Nebraska Wesleyan University in Social Work and Sociology with a minor in Psychology and was a member of academic honoraries. I also attended William Woods University in Fulton Missouri for 2 ½ years where I held leadership positions in national sorority and volunteer clubs. I married Rhett Stephenson, my high school sweetheart, after graduating from college. We will celebrate our 31st wedding anniversary in June. I went on to obtain my Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Nebraska Omaha. We are the proud parents of two teen sons, Mick (18) who graduate from Lincoln East in May and David (16) who is finishing his sophomore year at Lincoln East. Our sons have attended Pyrtle, Lux, East and the Entrepreneurial Focus Program. David will attend both The Career Academy and Lincoln East next year.

My husband and I have a large extended family. We each have four brothers, eight sister in laws and many nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews. My father in law, Bill Stephenson, taught social studies and drivers education and coached football at Lincoln Southeast for many years. He came to Southeast following teaching and coaching in Cambridge and Rushville. I have family members who have taught, counseled or administered at Kahoa, Hawthorne, Holmes, Clinton, West Lincoln, Lakeview, Beattie, Eastridge, Culler, Lefler, Northeast and Southeast with current faculty and counseling positions at Clinton, Holmes, Lefler, Culler and Northeast.

I was born and baptised into the Congregational faith. When we moved to Lincoln our family joined Westminster Presbyterian church where I was confirmed and married and a member for over 40 years. At Westminster I served as the Chair of Children and Family Ministries, taught Sunday School and served as a Deacon, Elder and member of the Nominating Committee. In my youth I was also active with the Young life organization. In 2013 we joined First Plymouth United Church of Christ (which includes the Congregational faith) where I attend regularly. Our younger son had an outstanding confirmation experience there as his older brother did at Westminster.

I have worked with children and families

in need for 35+ years including: ●

Mentoring (Big Brother/Big Sister
mentor in Lincoln and Fulton Mo.)

●Playground leader at Brownell and Meadowlane summer programs for Lincoln Parks and Recreation

● Youth Care Worker in residential settings at WICS Girls group home, Youth Service System Freeway Emergency Shelter and the Whitehall Campus all with youth who have been abused and neglected and are part of the child welfare and juvenile justice system

● Supervisor and administrator for residential cottages and community based group homes in Lincoln, Seward, Columbus, Hastings, Bellevue and Auburn

●Developed statewide Family Support program for the State of Nebraska with 80 staff to assist families to reunify with their children or remain together

●Oversaw \$25M in contracts for the child welfare and juvenile justice system across Nebraska working with over 100 non-profit organizations ●Oversaw the foster care, child caring and placing licensing for the state

●Oversaw the first Child and Family Service Review federal review of Nebraska's child welfare and juvenile justice system

●Served as the Chief Operating Officer for CEDARS for nearly 12 years overseeing programs, grants, accreditation and performance and quality improvement serving 1,000 children and families a day in a continuum of residential and community based services with a budget of \$8-25M.

My website is www.katiemcleesestephenson.com

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson

When I ran for office in 2011 I was primarily **motivated** by three things:

- my strong belief in public education and our Lincoln Public Schools that was informed by my education in LPS and the experience of our sons and my parental involvement in all levels of their education
- my experience working with children, youth and families in the child welfare and juvenile justice system who were often finding obstacles and failure in the system
- my desire to give back to our community and build on the strong tradition in my district set by Sally Wysong and Lillie Larsen.

These continue to be my motivators and I am also motivated by offering an outstanding education for all of our students each and every day in an environment that is safe, respectful and welcoming.

In the next four years in collaboration with my colleagues I hope to **accomplish**:

- Continuing to increase the graduation rate. When I was elected in 2011 we had a 82% graduation rate and it has increased to 87% and now our strategic goal is to reach 90% by 2019 focusing on the achievement, learning and opportunity gap for all students.
- Fulfill the promises of the \$153M bond passed by a 68% margin in 2014 including three new buildings (The Career Academy, Wysong Elementary School and Moore Middle School), as well as renovations, additions, increasing the bandwidth in our buildings and securing entrances.
- Rolling out the 10 year Technology Plan including the three year implementation of devices for students grades 3-12
- Continuing to ensure safe, respectful and welcoming environments for all students in our public schools

The three **qualifications** that I bring to the office are:

- 1.experienced member of the LPS board of education with leadership roles including vice chair of the board and committee chair for the student learning, policy, Americanism and personnel policy committees as well as board member for Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools.
- 2.Mother of students who have attended Pyrtle, Lux, East and the Entrepreneurial Focus Program and has been actively involved in the parent organizations at all levels including the president of the Pyrtle PTO.
- 3.Social Work professional and administrator with 35 years of experience working with children and families in need in Lincoln and across Nebraska including nearly 12 years as Chief Operating Officer at CEDARS.

Matt Schulte

I am running for school board because I have three young children who will soon be school-aged. I have also committed my life to improving the lives of teens through my career at Campus Life. I love being involved in student lives before and after school and would love to continually improve the education they are receiving during the day.

As a proven nonprofit executive and community leader I bring strong leadership into every situation.

As a parent and I will bring a true passion for students with me in each decision we will face.

As a small business owner I will bring a strong business sense to the board.

(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? (continued next page)

Matt Schulte

As a board we hire and supervise only one employee: the superintendent. When we disagree with a decision the superintendent is making we should first go to him in a private manner and address the situation. If the situation continues to escalate addressing the superintendent publically may become appropriate.

(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? (continued from previous page)

**Katie
McLeese
Stephenson**

As a board we have one employee, the superintendent of schools. It is our responsibility to hire, supervise and evaluate the superintendent. We work closely with Dr. Joel. As a board member we interact with our superintendent multiple times a month at our two board meetings and many committee meetings. We also talk regularly by phone and email. Under Dr. Joel's leadership the board developed a strategic plan for the district and we have a retreat each June where we set the goals for the year. These district goals are adopted as Dr. Joel's goals for the year as well. We discuss these regularly and track their progress. The evaluation of the goals is part of Dr. Joel's annual performance evaluation.

We have an open and two way communication with Dr. Joel. As an individual board member I share any concerns that I have with him and what I am hearing from the public. The positive and open communication that I have developed with Dr. Joel over the last four years would continue if I am re-elected.

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

**Katie
McLeese
Stephenson**

In 2010, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released their final Common Core State Standards — academic benchmarks intended to define the knowledge and skills that high school graduates will need in order to be successful in college and careers. NGA and CCSSO offered the standards to any state at no charge as long as it agreed to accept all of the standards and test students' mastery of them within three years. However, there is no entity or process for enforcing this agreement and states are free to drop in or out at any time. Four years later, more than 40 states and the District of Columbia are in the midst of implementing the Common Core in their public schools. Yet the public remains mostly unaware of the new standards or how they will affect schooling in their communities according to the Center for Public Education.

Under the State Department of Education Commissioner Doug Christensen Nebraska retained local control and did not have common state assessments and used the STARS program. Under former Commissioner Roger Breed the Nebraska State Assessment or NeSA was developed and implemented. Nebraska has felt that its state standards exceed those of the common core and have rejected it to date. Although we have not aligned with the Common Core 40 states have and as such most if not all of the curriculum materials are written with this in mind.

A negative aspect regarding not being a common core state is there is federal money that Nebraska is ineligible to apply for including the Race to the Top Initiative (RTTI) which had leveraged \$471m to states across the country. It seems to me that we may be able to implement Common Core Plus in Nebraska including the CCSSO and additional Nebraska standards. . There are states and school districts in our country that have struggled to meet minimum expectations and achievement for their students. This is not the case in Lincoln.

**Matt
Schulte**

No. Nebraska does not need to "sign in" to Common Core curriculum. Those who have are trying to get out because of the massive amounts of testing that the curriculum requires. I want to advocate for less classroom testing... in order to free teachers up to do what they do best... teach!

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson I believe that the purpose of education is to develop critical thinkers and help to shape the development of responsible adults. We need to prepare our students to learn and as stated in the Board’s mission to appreciate the arts, history and culture.

There are tremendous opportunities for students in extracurricular activities to learn about themselves, others, the arts, teamwork and so much more. These activities shape the lives of many students and may be what is engaging the students to continue in their educational pursuits. For these and so many more reasons extra-curricular activities are very important.

Matt Schulte Public Education is our society’s way of equipping and raising students to be good, active, knowledge-seeking citizens. Some of the non-academic activities that had the greatest impact on my life were intramurals, music, and other clubs. The school system should not spend time on controversial public topics but instead focus on pushing students to be the best they can be academically.

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson LPS works very hard with students to achieve high levels of literacy as well as numeracy. This begins in preschool and continues in K-12. Literacy is not just taught in reading and English, but it is woven throughout all curricula. We are constantly evaluating curriculum and bringing best practices forward for our students. We encourage reading and work to make reading fun and interesting for students. We encourage families to engage in reading with their students. We have several schools hosting family literacy programs for families where English is not their primary language and parents are at the school learning English and then are learning alongside their students.

Matt Schulte If students are graduating and are not literate, we should be questioning our standards for graduation.

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson LPS is growing rapidly. We added 1,200 students in the 14-15 academic year. We have added 4,000 students in the last five years. At the same time the number of ELL students increases. We have 44% of our students reporting that they are living in poverty as reported by qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program. This number is lower than the actual students eligible as we know in middle and high school students may be reluctant to sign up for the program despite their families financial situation. The average cost of educating a student in LPS is over \$10, 000 a student and this is on the lower end of the spectrum for per pupil spending across the state. Our special education students are remaining at a significant level, although not growing. Given all of these considerations we have significant needs. Our state aid formula is derived by needs-resources=state aid. If we decrease our property taxes when we have significant needs we will decrease our state aid, if not in this year then the next. Decreasing resources to education to meet the property tax issues of our state is not a solution that will meet the needs of our students.

Matt Schulte If there ever was a time that LPS could lower its levy now could be the time. Valuations are skyrocketing and the number of properties on tax roles is escalating due to the recent developments downtown and the addition of many new large residential neighborhoods. This is leading to record income to the school system.

(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.)?

Katie McLeese Stephenson There are resources that are shared from the public school system to those that chose parochial and home school environments. I was at St. Teresa's Catholic school last week and the LPS speech bus was there to accommodate those students needing assistance. There are also other special education services that are provided.

Matt Schulte I agree with Nebraska's laws that allow non-public school students to take advantage of academic and non-academic activities. I remember in high school having several students from a Catholic school in town participating in orchestra with me. I felt like they added value to our class.

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson It is the responsibility of teachers to need to present information that is scientifically proven, complies with LPS curriculum and state standards.

Matt Schulte We should teach students to be critical thinkers. Parents should be encouraged to be a part of their students understanding of the world.

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson It is my belief that we need to do our best to honor the religious expressions of our students. We also need to balance this with the educational demands during the day. The families need to alert the school as to the specific religious needs of their children.

Matt Schulte Yes students should have the right to pray as long as it is not disruptive to the educational environment. Should even be encouraged to do so in accordance with their beliefs and family practices.

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson I have served on this committee and I have chaired this committee. It is an important committee as are all of the committees that make up our work on the Lincoln Board of Education. We review the work of social studies curriculum and fulfill the other responsibilities of the statute. As an individual board member you do not take any actions alone. You work with others on your committees and then bring recommendations to the full board for action.

Matt Schulte I am not familiar with this statute. When elected I will learn and act accordingly.

(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. (continued on next page)

Matt Schulte Each parent should be encouraged to actively be involved in their child's education. Parents are involved in students' lives long before and long after their child receives an education through our public schools, we as educators should encourage teachers to hold parents in high esteem while continuing to educate utilizing best practices.

(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. (continued from previous page)

Katie McLeese Stephenson

This is a great question. It points out that there are natural and dynamic tensions at times between our parents and our professional faculty that are entrusted with educating our students in the public schools. Each have a distinct role in the education process and one requires communication to enhance the successful education of the children and youth. As a board member one of my important roles is to set policy. In doing so we need to think of the impact that policies have on parents and how to make them friendly toward parents. We also work hard to ensure that parents know and understand our policies and this past year we have enhanced our website to assist parents.

When a parent contacts me with a concern I first of all listen and reinforce them for their advocacy on behalf of their son or daughter. Then I work with them to understand what they have done already to resolve the issue. It is important that concerns are directly addressed with the teacher and then the building administration and if that is not successful the appropriate district level administrator. We have entered a new era with technology where some parents, and certainly not all, chose to address their issues using social media and not directly with those that they directly have concerns with. Digital citizenship is a skill for parents as well as students.

The bottom line is that parental engagement is a good thing and we need to work to support this. There are families that are not currently engaged with their schools and we need to encourage this at all levels.

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson

Within the public school system we serve each and every student that enrolls as they come to us. There are accommodations that need to be made to help students achieve success. There are also state and federal laws that guide our work in the public schools.

Matt Schulte

Appropriate accommodations should be made for every student. As I have talked with parents in our district I have heard many experiences indicating that high achievers, non-English speakers and children with downs syndrome are the most underserved student groups in our school system.

(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 you most closely agree, and why?

Katie McLeese Stephenson

As a part of the health curriculum we provide instruction to students regarding a variety of human growth and development topics. There are students whose family also provide information to them on various topics and students whose parents elect not to talk to them about this content. The schools need to provide information that is factual and describes safe, legal and medically accurate content. Parents should be aware of content and are free according to a long standing LPS policy to opt their students out of any content that they find objectionable or prefer to review with their students at home.

Matt Schulte

As with any controversial issue parents should be made aware of what and how these things will be discussed with students. Parents may be more aware of reasons that these discussions may or may not be appropriate for their child.

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson I support information being provided to students that aligns with the curriculum and provides legal, safe and medically accurate information. This includes a wide range of information including abstinence education. The decision to have an abortion is deeply personal and one that a woman makes with her loved ones and in consideration of her spiritual beliefs. It comes with a great degree of contemplation. Any type of situation that causes stress for students and upheaval in their personal lives can cause academic and social changes. We also see this impact from other concerns like mental health issues, abuse, neglect, homelessness, substance abuse and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Matt Schulte Much of what Planned Parenthood does as an abortion clinic is clearly controversial, even if something is legal does not mean it is not controversial. In accordance with LPS' policy parents should be notified when these controversial speakers will be presenting in schools. I do know many girls who have considered abortion. Part of the reason we started our Parent Life program was that if we as a society are encouraging teens to keep their babies alive then we should create a support system for them to succeed as parents. I am endorsed by Nebraska Right to Life.

(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?

Katie McLeese Stephenson I attended college in a small town in Fulton Missouri. There were two gender specific schools, William Woods and Westminster in the town and it was economically and racially divided. The main street between the two colleges was referred to as "brown town" by the upperclassmen. I was a social work major and a big sister in the big brother/big sister program. My "little" lived in brown town. Her mother was white and her stepfather was black. Tammy was white. She used to come to the dorm and hang out with me and spend the night on occasion. From the moment I heard the term brown town I was horrified. I asked people that used this term to please stop using it. They looked at me strangely and I shared that it was racially offensive to me and to others. When my friends met Tammy and understood where she lived they became more sensitive to the issue.

Matt Schulte I spent significant time in Central America studying Spanish and helping people in need. I remember walking into an extremely unsafe neighborhood many times and feeling like I was walking into a very dark place. We worked with individuals to improve their sanitation, education, and access to resources. One time as we entered a neighborhood I was prevented from entering by the local drug lords. We stepped back from our work and began collaborating more closely with people who lived in the neighborhood and the doors were open to us again.

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

Katie McLeese Stephenson I look to others that I consider to be well informed on a topic to provide me with information that can assist me in making a decision. This may include students, teachers, parents, district staff, fellow and former board members, community members, my own research etc. I also look to people that have values that are consistent with mine even though we have differing viewpoints. In addition to these sources I trust my intuition to guide me.

Matt Schulte When I face a major decision I usually go to my wife, I go to God in prayer, and I meet with my board of directors at Campus Life. As I serve on the school board I will also go to voters living in my district.

Declare anything else you want voters to know about you.

Katie McLeese Stephenson When our sons were in elementary school I learned a great deal about parental engagement. They attended Pyrtle and I had the opportunity to serve as secretary, president-elect, president and past-president of the PTO. We accomplished a great deal during that time engaging families and supporting the staff and administration at our school. This has been a model for me for involvement as our sons went on to middle and high school. Volunteering in their classrooms, for their events and extracurricular activities has a great opportunity. I have used these experiences along with my own experiences as a student and alumni of LPS and my professional experience in the community to bring an informed voice to the board of education.

Matt Schulte [nothing further noted]