

**United Educators Association
Spring 2021
School Board Candidate Questionnaire**

**Name: Mark C. Schluter
District: Northwest ISD Place: 2**

1. Please provide any personal background information you would like to share with the employees of the district.

I have had the honor a privilege to work with amazing educators. I have been inspired by their commitment to the education of our diverse student body. I went to school in Northwest ISD from first to twelfth grade. I am who I am today because my teachers took an interest in me, encouraged me, and gave me the mindset to achieve anything that I chose to be. They taught me respect, hard work and appreciation for the education that I received. My father also happened to be my algebra and physics teacher in high school. He taught me the value of giving back to the community. Many of my friends that had my father as a teacher later told me how much my father had meant to them in their lives. He instilled in me the importance of education and being part of the process rather than a bystander watching life happen. Lesson #1 every person can make a difference in someone else's life. That is why I chose to run for school board.

2. How often have you attended school board or district level committee meetings over the past year?

I have served on the school board for 24 years. Over the past year I have attended over 30 board meetings, committee meetings, town hall meetings, board workshops and board trainings. I was so happy to see the board go back to face-to-face meetings. Zoom meetings, while necessary for the circumstances, just don't translate to the best collaborative atmosphere. I am ready to get back to having meetings without masks and the board room full of parents and teachers.

3. What three issues do you think are the most important facing the district? Please explain.

#1 – Students. Our students and teachers have been through so much since March 2020 – we all have. I want to make sure we do everything we can to address our students' social/emotional needs and give our kids the tools they need to succeed in the world after they leave us. Our goal is to make all NISD graduates' college, career, military, and life ready. Our teachers are our first line of connection to our

students. As a district we must support our teachers with the training, coaching and resources it takes for them to be successful with our students. NISD has been blessed with wonderful teachers who care so much for their students as if they were their own children.

#2 – Communication. The board can never communicate too much. We are making efforts to reach out to students, parents' teachers, and community members to help us to re-connect. We had to make so many decisions regarding Remote Learning, COVID protocols, and the return to In-Person Learning we want to be sure and listen to their needs and concerns. We use multiple platforms to provided information in a variety of different way. As of April 9, 2021 we had 20,135 Facebook likes, 16,086 Twitter followers and 6,304 Instagram followers. The superintendent puts out staff newsletters periodically and the board sends out meeting notes to parents after the meetings. We can always do more as the COVID protocols begin to change and we can have town hall meetings again.

#3 – Budget. With the \$10 million reduction of our state funding by the legislature, we are working diligently to retain our teachers, protect classroom sizes, and protect programs that serve the majority of our students. The District has two types of funds that we operate under, which are: (1) the M&O budget which pays salaries and operates our schools; and (2) the I&S budget that pays for new buildings and funding from that comes from successful bond elections. The reduction in funding is to our M&O budget. As a board member I must work to provide the resources to our classrooms regardless of how difficult that might be.

4. How will you as a board member ensure input from community members, parents, teachers, and business is heard and acted upon?

As a board member I have always advocated for transparency and availability. Our board president recently asked each board member how we can create an avenue for gathering input from our community. Dr. Warren has done a great job of informing the parents and stakeholders of our District our challenges and solutions through his Facebook Live, but it is important for board members to also interact. I have asked for monthly forums to be held virtually while there is a COVID threat and then face to face as soon as that is possible. This way we can meet and listen to the passion that our parents and teachers have for our students and how we can better serve them. We have used the PTA as a great connection to their energy and continue to encourage parents to be part of their children's school. I have supported adding parents, teachers, students, and property owners to be part of our committees to provide input. This has worked well with our bond committee, boundary committee and textbook committees. It has been a difficult year and we have worked to provide several means of communication that we continue to build on. I want to work on developing more committees and support teacher and student participation.

5. As a board member, what would you see as the board's role in providing competitive salaries and benefits for its employees?

Northwest ISD's goal is to be the best and most sought-after school district in the State. We have achieved that by hiring the best teachers and administrators. This has resulted in a multitude of applications for every position that is posted. We have been proud to say that we have been in the top 10 of Districts in the Metroplex in total compensation packages. Unfortunately, we have fallen behind due to our recent budget issues as a result of HB 3. We worked as a team to make the cuts to keep our current staff intact although we had to transfer some teachers to support growth in other campuses. We will continue to assist them with resources, training and teacher support and give them opportunity to move into administrative roles if they chose. The NISD board has always strived to be extremely competitive with salaries and benefits and will continue to work towards this goal. Raises are always important to keep this competitive edge and as a board member I will support that.

6. As a board member how would you expect the district to handle an employee who needs improvement?

We are all human and make mistakes and sometimes need encouragement or a nudge to recorrect our course. As a board member I will work to create policies that will encourage growth plans and constant feedback to our teachers and staff. As a manager in the private sector, I understand the need to train to expectations, provide the resources to excel, then follow up on goals. I often look to my method of training when my employees fail and offer coaching to turn them around. Every employee is different and learn in different ways. As a board member I will advocate giving the benefit of the doubt and offer assistance to encourage our employees.

7. Please discuss any other issue you feel is relevant to your election to the Board of Trustees.

Growth is one the biggest issues facing board members. With more that 1,100 new students entering our District every year it is important to talk facilities and teachers. We are counting on a bond to pass but need to have a contingency plan if it doesn't. Either way we need to hire additional teachers to keep our student-teacher ratio to an acceptable limit. If we don't continue to hire awesome teachers, we will fail to deliver the education that our students and parents expect. I have lived in this District my entire life and have seen the good times and the bad. I know that when we work together, we will come out of this a lot stronger, and I have no doubt we will be successful with a team approach.