

ELECTION GUIDE

2026 PRIMARY



BELTRAMI COUNTY CANDIDATES

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BELTRAMI COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

How primary elections work



In partisan races or those with political parties, only one candidate in each party moves on. For example, the winner of the Republican primary for governor will be on the ballot in the November general election. The rest of the candidates are out of the running.

You can only vote for one party, but you choose which one, as Minnesota doesn't have party registration.

In nonpartisan races, the primary narrows the pool of candidates down to twice the number of available seats. So if five candidates are running for county sheriff, the top two in the primary will be on the ballot in November. If 14 people are running for four seats on the school board, the top eight will advance.

Where and when do I vote?

There are three ways to vote in Minnesota: by mail, early in-person and in-person on Election Day.



Voting by mail began June 26. Some precincts in rural areas are mail ballot precincts, and ballots are automatically mailed to registered voters there. If you don't live in a mail ballot precinct, you can still request a ballot at mnvotes.gov/absentee. You can return your ballot by mail, and those ballots must be received by no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day. Or, you can drop it off yourself at your county elections office no later than 5 p.m. on Election Day.



Early in-person voting also began June 26. You can go to your county's early voting location(s), usually the courthouse or government center, and fill out an absentee ballot. You will need to know your MN ID or Social Security number to fill out the application.

Starting July 24, voters can cast ballots as part of the "early voting process," which is more similar to voting on Election Day. You'll fill out a short certificate, fill out a ballot and then put it into the ballot counter.

Beltrami County early in-person voting locations are: Beltrami County Auditor-Treasurer's Office in Bemidji (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.), Little Rock Community Center (Tuesday, July 28, 4-8 p.m.), Redby Community Center (Wednesday, July 29, 4-8 p.m., Ponemah Community Center (Monday, Aug. 3, 4-8 p.m.) and Red Lake Community Center (Tuesday, Aug. 4, 4-8 p.m.).



On **Primary Election Day**, Tuesday, Aug. 11, you can go to your local polling place to vote until 8 p.m. You can find your polling place at mnvotes.gov/pollfinder.

Local election officials also send teams of election judges to nursing homes and hospitals during the 35 days before the election and provide ballots to voters who live in the city or town where the facility is located. You can contact facility management or your local election office to find out when that will happen.

BELTRAMI COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

How do I register to vote?



You can register to vote or update your registration online at mnvotes.gov or by returning a paper form to your local elections office until July 21. You'll need an email address and your driver's license or the last four digits of your Social Security number.

You can also register when you vote, either early in-person or on Election Day. You'll need to bring one proof of residence, like your driver's license or a photo ID paired with a bill or lease.

Where can I find more information?

For more details on voting, you can visit mnvotes.gov, call 1-877-600-VOTE (8683), text 651-217-3862 or contact your county election office.

For more on the 2026 election, including candidates, maps and more, visit kaxe.org/election2026.

What is KAXE?



KAXE is a Northern Minnesota public radio station, founded in 1976. We have signals in Grand Rapids (91.7), Bemidji (90.5) and Brainerd (89.9), and our broadcast can always be streamed at kaxe.org.

KAXE News began in 2023, and our team of Northern Minnesota-born-and-raised journalists puts together this Primary Election Guide.

KAXE's Election Guide methodology



KAXE contacted every candidate three times using contact information submitted to the Secretary of State's Office when they filed for office. Candidate responses have not been edited and are published as submitted.

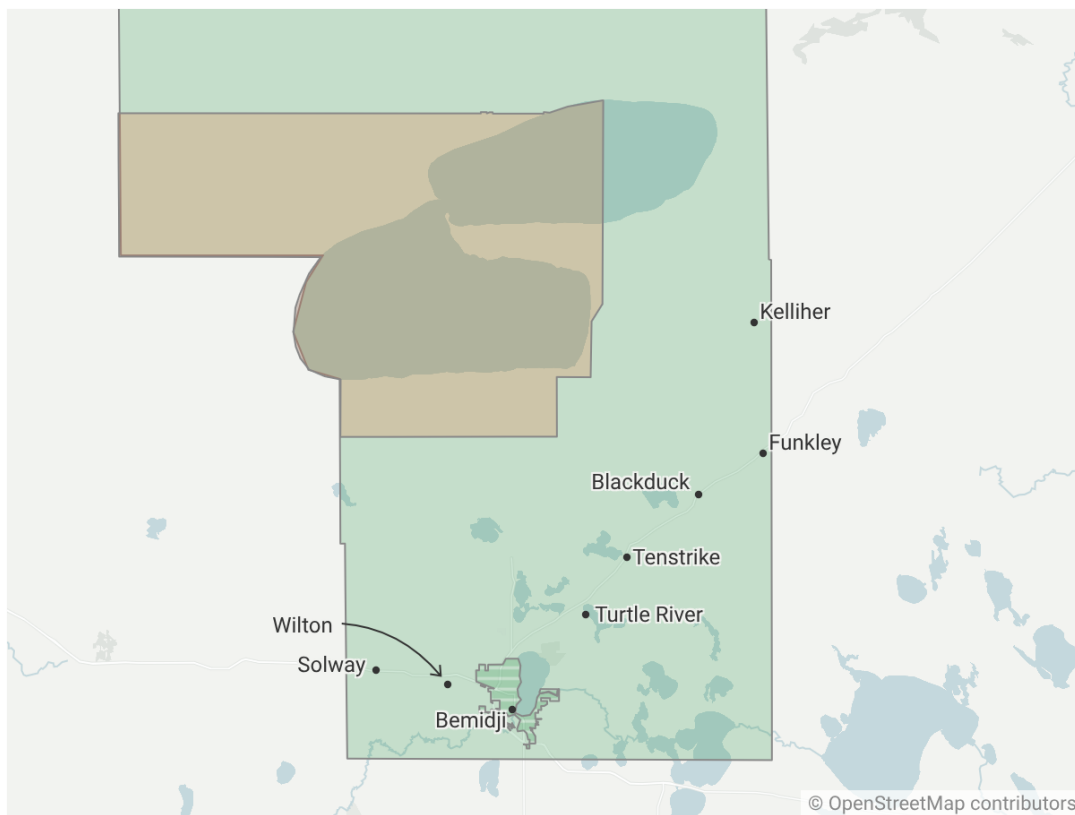
As necessary, our news team added contextual information and corrected inaccuracies, marked with editor's notes in italics.

Please contact us at news@kaxe.org with questions or comments or to report any errors.

BELTRAMI COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

About Beltrami County districts

Two of the races in this guide will only be on some Beltrami County voters' ballots: the races for Bemidji City Council and Red Lake School District. Check the map below to see if you live in one of these districts.



 Bemidji

 Red Lake School District

Created with Datawrapper

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS



Luke Gulbranson
lukegulbranson.com



John Munter
munterforcongress.substack.com



Trina Swanson
trinaforcongress.com
Party endorsed

Candidate campaign website as reported to the Minnesota Secretary of State.

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS



Age on Election Day: 42

Community: I live in Eveleth, where I was born and raised.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I am a small businessman and hockey coach. My main small business is a maple syrup company.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. My lived experience has prepared and motivated me to run for office. I am a fourth generation Iron Ranger, and my family really struggled growing up. We got by with the help of government programs like food assistance, free school lunches, and energy assistance. When my dad was able to get a union job with the 49ers, life got more stable. From these experiences, I understand the people of the district and the struggles they face, the importance of good union jobs and the stability they provide, and the importance of protecting programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid that are currently under threat.

Luke Gulbranson

Why are you running? I am running because for too long, working people and the middle class have been getting the short end of the stick. Pete Stauber, and far too many members of Congress, are looking out for themselves and the wealthy. We need a representative who will fight selflessly, not selfishly, every day so that working families can live and thrive in Minnesota.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I will fight everyday for the people of the North and Central Minnesota in Congress. First, we have to win, and as an Iron Ranger, union member, and small business owner - I am the best candidate to take on Pete Stauber. I'm running because families across the 8th district are struggling. Their costs are going up and their wages are nowhere near keeping up. And who is Pete Stauber looking out for? The big money and special interests calling the shots. I'm not a politician and I'm not running to serve the rich and the powerful. I'm running to serve my friends and neighbors in Minnesota so they get a fair shot and a voice in their future.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. My top three priorities are to lower the cost of essential goods and services, protect Social Security and Medicare, and stand up for unions and workers. First, to lower the cost of essentials, I will tackle the rising cost of healthcare head-on. On protecting Social Security and Medicare, I will support and vote for a bill that reverses

the barbaric cuts made to these programs in the One Big Ugly Bill. Finally, as someone who understands the power of a union job, I will stand up for unions and working people. I will advocate for fair working conditions at all places of work and accountability for corporations that treat their employees unfairly.

What are your natural resources policy positions? My grandfather was a foreman at the Oliver mine. My uncles and dad were heavy equipment operators and Local 49 union members. I know that mining is not only a path to the middle class for thousands of people but the backbone of towns across the district. I also have always had a deep love of the outdoors, like so many people across this district. I don't support mining in the area near the Boundary Waters and would have voted no on Pete Stauber's bill that ends protection for that piece of federal land. The Boundary Waters are too important to us, to our water, to our way of life here. However, I support mining, including copper-nickel mining, at currently operating mines and at proposed sites under development if companies meet all rules and regulations necessary to do so.

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U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS

Luke Gulbranson (continued)

How would you ensure constituents who didn't vote for you still feel represented?

We send one person to Washington DC to be accountable and responsive to each and every person across our district, and I would always work hard to do that if elected. It would be a priority to hire excellent staff representative of the district, to return home and be present in the district outside of session, and to hold regular town hall meetings across the district.

What would you do if what's best for your district differed from your party's position on an issue?

I'm running for Congress to represent this district. Not a party. Not a president. And certainly not corporations and the wealthy - which is why I will not accept a dime of Corporate PAC money. Every decision I make will be based on conversations with constituents right here at home.

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS



Age on Election Day: 77
Community: Warba, MN

John Munter

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I have had published in the Duluth News Tribune countless opinion pieces on the issues of the day for the past six years. I feel, also, that I have the best appreciation of many conservative viewpoints betrayed by the current Administration and MN 8 Congress Member as well as liberal viewpoints. See MunterforCongress.substack.com

How would you ensure constituents who didn't vote for you still feel represented?

We all want the same things-- jobs, housing, and health care and I look forward to debating the fine points of issues with everyone. I think we all have the common sense that we can no longer afford this extended American empire and need to focus on economies at home.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I am retired on my hobby farm and work as an author.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I look for solutions. During the Line 3 pipeline hearings I was solely responsible for pushing the State to remove defunct pipelines from private properties with my study showing the pipes were not too close together to be removed safely.

Why are you running? I may be old but I can do my age in push-ups and am mentally agile. For example, 21 corporations in Duluth own 10 or more single family homes which should be reserved for young people building equity-- addressed perhaps by taxation, 300 foot separations, or national private equity bans.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. Jobs, housing, and health care--1) rejecting the data center and copper nickel mining because they threaten more jobs than they create. I support taxes on AI chips and tokens to pay for the white collar job apocalypse retraining 2) I support Ro Khanna's plan to create 3 million more homes paid for with windfall profits tax on oil companies as well as a nation-wide ban on private equity buying up single family homes. I support single payer health care which cuts the cost by half and group buying by the US of pharmaceuticals.

What are your natural resources policy positions? Copper nickel mining in Northern Minnesota is stupid in creating toxic waste piles threatening our hospitality. fishing, and tourism industries. The iron ore industry should do better in mercury reduction. Pulsar Helium is non-polluting and promising hundreds of jobs in years to come with great drilling results.

What would you do if what's best for your district differed from your party's position on an issue?

They can go jump in Lake Superior. I have always thought the Ukraine War was stupid in pushing NATO nukes 6 minutes fly time to Moscow-- and aid to Israel in the Gaza genocide was evil. The current US Military-Israel fusion (Section 224 of the NDAA) is treasonous but 94% of Congress takes money from the Israeli lobby. Ro Khanna and Thomas Massie are my heroes for getting some Epstein files released working across the aisle.

Editor's note: Roughly 94% of current members of Congress have accepted campaign funds from pro-Israel lobbyists, according to [Track AIPAC](#).

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS



Trina Swanson

will use my experience in foreign policy, national security, immigration, and public service to hit the ground running on day one.

Why are you running? I grew up in a working-class home in Hermantown. My Mom was a nurse, and my Dad was a carpenter, later working at the paper mill. Our kitchen conversations weren't about politics. They were about making ends meet, looking out for neighbors, and believing that if you worked hard enough, you could build a comfortable life. I learned that unions strengthen the middle class, that communities thrive when people show up for each other, and that honest work should buy you a life with dignity, not constant insecurity. That's not happening in northern and central Minnesota. The current Representative is putting corporate interests and profits before the working people trying to raise families and retire with dignity. I want to continue my service to this country as an elected official, drawing upon the experience and leadership skills I gained as a 25-year public servant.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? Competence, experience, leadership, integrity, grit. These are the traits I will bring to the job on day one. This election is far too important to put forward a candidate without the experience to do the job. I understand the issues. I worked in Washington, D.C. I know why Washington works, but more importantly, why it doesn't work. I spent my career serving under both parties, bringing people with diverse backgrounds and opinions to

the table, identifying solutions, and building coalitions to implement those solutions. Congress needs to get back to this approach, crossing the aisle to solve problems. Furthermore, I am the Candidate that can win in November. I have already shown up for public forums in all 21 counties, answered unscripted questions, and engaged on complicated issues. I earned the DFL endorsement in May on the very first ballot with over 70% of delegates voting for me.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. Universal healthcare, proper federal funding for childcare, schools, hospitals, and programs the working class relies upon, and attracting new industries with good-paying jobs to the district. I will fight from day one for universal healthcare. We get to decide what our values are and how we spend our money. We currently have a representative who supports cuts to programs that the middle class relies upon, so the 1% can receive greater tax breaks. Minnesota pays more in federal taxes than it receives back in federal funding. I will fight for Minnesota to receive proper federal funding, rather

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Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? JET Global Solutions, LLP, Founding Partner and Attorney

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I began my career as a public servant at just 18 years old at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. This was my job throughout college and law school. I then joined U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, where I served for almost 20 years. I represented our country in Minnesota, Washington, D.C., Germany, and Kenya. I led international operations and national emergency responses, combated national security and criminal threats, and ensured immigration benefits were granted lawfully, all while working for administrations of both parties, to keep Americans safe. I left a career I loved when I was asked to do things I believed were unethical. I

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: DEMOCRATS

Trina Swanson (continued)

than placing the responsibility on the state, resulting in property tax increases. I will advocate for new industry investment like clean energy and green steel production, with good-paying union jobs. People should be able to stay in the communities they love, raise families, and retire with dignity.

What are your natural resources policy positions?

Generations to come must be able to enjoy this amazing land we call home. We must ensure we have clean water. That means we use science, the experts, and regulatory processes to ensure corporations use the most advanced technological means in their industries to minimize the impact on the environment and manage natural resources sustainably. I will ensure proper funding for federal agencies with oversight of our natural resources, to include returning to proper staffing levels after DOGE cuts, and reopening offices that closed, like the U.S. Forest Service research facility in Grand Rapids. Mining cannot be allowed in the BWCA watershed. However, we can continue to advance technologies for mining in the Iron Range, and hold corporations accountable, so mining is done in a responsible manner, minimizing the impact on the environment and water.

How would you ensure constituents who didn't vote for you still feel represented?

I will show up. A Representative is just that, a representative of all people in their district. I will continue to show up in all 21 counties. This district is so vast and varied that what's most important to one area may not be the most important issue in another. I will make decisions based on what I think is best for the greatest number of people in the district. In order to do this, I will engage. I will have offices staffed around the district, so constituents feel heard. I will hold town halls in person, without requiring prescreened questions. I will explain why I voted for or against a bill, take feedback, and learn and grow. But, this all starts by electing people with integrity, who understand the issues and the implications for the district. I am that person for CD-8.

What would you do if what's best for your district differed from your party's position on an issue?

I will fight for what's best for the district. I am not running for office for power or to spend decades in the position. It is time to break out of voting party lines and instead come together in Congress to solve problems. For too long now, each side tries to score political points and win elections by politicizing serious issues like immigration, the future of Social Security, taxes, and health care. Rather than worrying about the next election cycle, Representatives need to govern, represent the people, and get things done. We have seen a Congress unwilling to stand up to this Administration and the dangerous implications of their unwillingness. I will take my oath seriously, an oath to defend the Constitution, rather than a party or administration. That's what I did in my 25-year career as a public servant.

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: REPUBLICANS



Anthony Hamilton

anthonyhamiltonforcongress.com



Pete Stauber*

petestauberforcongress.com

*Incumbent
Party endorsed*

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

Candidate campaign website as reported to the Minnesota Secretary of State.

U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: REPUBLICANS



Age on Election Day: 43
Community: Mora

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I am a farmer. I farm my own land.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Our founders never intended for Congress to create career politicians. They envisioned citizen legislators to temporarily occupy these seats. Farmers, veterans, tradesmen, working class people who would step away from their lives to serve and return home. That is the tradition I intend to keep. I am a farmer, my qualification isn't a resume built inside Washington rubbing elbows with lobbyists. It's a lifetime of solving real problems with limited resources. I know what the cost of gas, doctor bills, grocery costs, vet bills, and when the harvest doesn't go as planned, do to a monthly budget. The 8th district is full of people who work with their hands, manage their own finances, and deal with the

Anthony Hamilton

consequences of decisions made by people who have never lived anything close to their lives. I am one of those people. That is my qualification.

Why are you running? I'm running because I'm no longer willing to sit and watch our government act this corrupt. I spent years doing what most people do, calling and emailing my representative, hoping someone would listen. Nobody did. Our government isn't broken, it's corrupt and there is a difference between those two words. Broken things can be fixed by accident. Corrupt things are working exactly as designed, just not for you and me. Lobbyists write our laws. Members of Congress trade stocks on information you and I will never have. The government shuts down and the people who caused it still get paid. I got tired of waiting for someone else to fix it. So I wrote the CAPT Act. A five-part reform bill covering stock trading bans, lobbying restrictions, salary accountability, attendance requirements, and term limits. I'm serious about this, I am willing to go do it myself. That's why I'm running.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I am not a performance. I don't have a consultant telling me what to say to a donor expecting something in return. I've taken zero PAC money. I don't owe anyone anything except the people in this district. Pete has been in Washington since 2019. Our debt has climbed toward \$40 trillion, our grocery bills have gone up, healthcare costs have gone up, and the lobby

money flowing into his campaign has gone up. That is not a record to run on. That is a record to run from. I'm running because I want my children to grow up knowing their government won't cheat them. That it belongs to them. Right now it doesn't, and Pete is part of the reason why. Voters should choose me because I'm the only candidate in this race who can't be bought. That is not a talking point, it's just the math.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. My top priority is congressional reform and real accountability. I authored the CAPT Act, a five part bill that addresses the core corruption that drives every other problem in Washington. One: Term limits. Three in the House and Two in the Senate, no more career politicians feeding at the troughs for decades. Two: End lobbying corruption and foreign money in our legislative process. Lobbyists write our laws, that has to stop. Three: Ban congressional stock trading for every member of Congress and staff. Four: Financial accountability for shutdowns and unbalanced budgets. Shut down the government, lose your salary for the full

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U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 8: REPUBLICANS

Anthony Hamilton (continued)

duration, no pay back. Every year without a balanced budget triggers a 10% pay cut. Five: Mandatory attendance. Show up and do the job you were elected to do or you don't get paid. Same as every other job in America. Fix Congress first, then fix everything else.

What are your natural resources policy positions?

Minnesota's natural resources belong to the people of this state, not to foreign corporations, not to Chilean mining companies shipping the output to China and then call it American energy independence. I support domestic mining and timber. CD8 was built on resource industries and I will not apologize for that. That doesn't mean we have to risk destroying the Boundary Waters to watch Chilean companies get rich while supplying Chinese domestic production. Pete sponsored opening the watershed to sulfide mining through H.J.140 knowing the outcome and who would benefit. I would not have let this happen.

How would you ensure constituents who didn't vote for you still feel represented?

Every constituent in this district deserves to be heard. That starts with showing up, something that Pete has failed to do. He has not held a single in-person town hall in over seven years in office. That is not representation, that is avoidance. I have been holding town halls before I am even elected. That is the standard I intend to keep. Beyond that, I am looking closely at congressional staffing allowances and how they can be deployed to actually serve constituents across this district, not donors, not lobbyists, not party leadership. People who call my office should reach someone whose job is to listen and help, not manage them. You don't have to agree with me on everything to deserve a representative who answers the phone. That is the baseline and I intend to meet it.

What would you do if what's best for your district differed from your party's position on an issue? I would unapologetically side with my constituents. That is the job. I am not running to be a reliable party vote, I am running to represent the people of the 8th district. If those two things conflict, there is no conflict, my constituents win every time. This is why I wrote the CAPT Act. A member of Congress why is financially beholden to a party, donor, or PAC cannot make that choice freely. The money owns the vote before the vote is even cast. I don't have that problem. I don't owe anyone anything except the people in this district. The founders didn't design this system for party soldiers. They designed it for citizen legislators who would use their own judgement on behalf of the people they represent. That is the job I am applying for.

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

**Voters will select one candidate.
The top two vote-getters will advance to the November ballot.**



Ron Johnson



Audrey M. Thayer
Incumbent



Grace Wilder

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE



Age on Election Day: 76
Community: The City of Bemidji

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I was employed by Lakeland Public Television as their Design/Promotion Manager for 43 years. Retire in 2023. for 43 (Design/Prol was employed by Lakeland Public Television as their motion Manager) for 43 years. Retired in 2023

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office.

Education:

I am a graduate of Bemidji State University, Alexandria Technical College and Brown Institute of Minneapolis. I am a former adjunct faculty member in the Visual Arts Department at Bemidji State University. I was named a Bemidji State University Outstanding Alumni in 2010

Leadership Experience:

I have 24 years experience serving on the Bemidji City Council representing Ward 3 from 2001 to 2024

Ron Johnson

I was a member of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities Board of Directors for 20 years and served as President in 2018-2019

I was a member of the League of Minnesota Cities Board of Directors for 8.5 years and served as President in 2022-2023

Graduate of the Blandin Community Leadership Program - 2003, 2004

Graduate of the Northwest Minnesota Foundation Community Leadership Program - 1994

Why are you running? My time on the city council ended in 2024. Do to redistricting, I was not eligible to run for my my Ward 3 seat that I had represented since 2001. After two years out of city government, I am energized and looking forward to the opportunity to represent all five Bemidji Wards on the city council. I had a great run and played an important role in many significant accomplishments for Bemidji during my first stint on the council. However, there is important work yet to be done as we continue building a better Bemidji and I would appreciate an opportunity to once again be part of it.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I am a lifelong resident of Bemidji. I was born and raised in Bemidji and I'm a graduate of Bemidji High School. Over my lifetime, my immediate family has lived in all five Bemidji wards so I know Bemidji very well. I feel my statewide leadership experience combined with 24 years of city council experience makes me well qualified to be the next At-Large Council Mamber for the great city of Bemidji.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for. The basic role of the At-Large City council position is to represent the entire community of Bemidji to ensure municipal accountability. The At-Large position is an equal part of a seven member city council (Mayor and six council members) working together to pass local laws and ordinances, to approve the annual city budget and to determine the city tax levy. Since Bemidji operates under a Council-Manager form of government, the council's only direct employee is the City Manager.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. My 24 years on the city council and particularly my statewide leadership experience has afforded me the opportunity to meet many extraordinary public leaders. One leader, however, that stands out for me is current Bemidji Mayor Jorge Prince. I served with Mayor Prince for four years including as his Mayor Pro Tem. Jorge has many attributes that make him a strong mayor but the things I admire most is that he's an articulate, transparent mayor who prioritizes community well being. He actively listens to his constituents ensuring they feel

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BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

Ron Johnson (continued)

heard and understood. Jorge was recently name the 2026 recipient of the Tommy Longo Disaster Leadership Award (a national honor) for his leadership during Bemidji's 2025 devastating Derecho. Jorge is truly great Mayor and I'm proud to call him my friend.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing?

Public Safety
Affordable Housing
Living Wage Jobs

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected?

All three are inter-related... but I believe solving the housing issue will attract economic growth and better paying jobs. When businesses look to expand or relocate to a community, the first thing they look at is available housing. A strong housing market is key to a strong job market. Good jobs and affordable housing is key to reducing crime and improving public safety. So affordable housing is most important. There are many state and federal grants available to cities for various types of housing. Also, the city could take steps to revise it's strict local ordinances, eliminate zoning bottlenecks and create a more developer friendly environment.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers, if elected?

Data centers are certainly a hot topic nationwide but (so far) they have not been an issue for the Bemidji area. I don't currently have a strong opinion either for or against them. Data centers are not going away but I do believe they will continue to become more efficient over time which could lessen environmental concerns. Data centers have many pros and cons.. The pros include economic growth, job creation and infrastructure upgrades while the cons include massive energy draw, high water consumption and community/environmental disruption. I was recently discussing data centers with some friends who live in the Washington DC area and it was interesting that they did not have the same concerns that people here in Minnesota have. Most folks seem to understand the need for data centers... they just don't want them in their "backyard".

Many Northern Minnesota cities are experiencing tightening budgets. Where would you propose making cuts, if needed?

During my 24 years on the Bemidji City Council I have been involved with developing 24 annual budgets for the city. It is rare to find a department budget that didn't have line items that couldn't be reduced (or in some instances eliminated) without significant negative impact to service delivery. One specific area I would like to address is the operation of the the Sanford Center. I think the city would see a significant savings by managing the Sanford Center in-house (like the City of Mankato) and eliminate the need and expense of a management company.

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

Audrey Thayer



Age on Election Day: 75
Community: Bemidji, MN
for 37 years

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I have been a Higher Education Instructor for over 13 years at Leech Lake Tribal College

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Served in for over 5 years serving the City of Bemidji. ABD Doctorate in Organizational Leadership - University of St. Thomas. Instructor for 13 years at Leech Lake Tribal College. Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology from Cambridge College. Adjunct Faculty 15 years for Bemidji State University - Social Work 10 years in U.S. Constitutional Community Educator for American Civil Liberties Union in Northern Minnesota, 11 years with U.S. Indian Health Service, in financial contracting in a three-state area, marketing work for small local nonprofit radio. Five years I have been actively

organizing in our city of Bemidji in the areas of the unhoused, infrastructure for the city, led the Sustainability Commission since elected. Invested in transportation issues that continue, further housing that benefits the most in need, providing and testifying consistently on state house/senate on childcare, wild rice, boundary waters issues. Currently serve on the Council of Greater MN Cities.

Why are you running? There are unfinished issues with the on-going financial burdens of the Sanford Event Center, expanding transportation for 24-hour services, economic development, housing and supporting local businesses. Most importantly, I am in community consistently listening and bringing the messages to our city council moving the city issues forward.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I have served the citizens, as an elected official for over five years. My consist views on keeping taxes low to protect the 51% of those that do not own property, young families and our retirees is important for our city. Livable employment opportunities must be continued to be promoted. My family are working class and understand marginalization. I am an active visible council member that listens, cares and believes that the people voice matter. The decisions made were the peoples. Some disagree others understand how decisions must be made that best serves ALL the people not just some. My personal and elected office position on public safety, sustainability, support of young

families in our city is evident. My voting platform provides the proof. Our family, this is our ancestral home. This means protecting the land base, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Editor's note: Bemidji's homeownership rate is 43.8%, and Beltrami County's is 68.3%, according to a housing study by the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund and Sanford Health published in October 2025.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for. I am respectfully requesting to be re-elected as the City of Bemidji - Councilor at Large. This position serves all the five wards within the city. You represent every citizen. The position considers all of the interests of the citizens. It requires not a single or two issue affecting the city, but what is the best for the people in every issue. Counselors at Large serve on multiple city commissions and boards, has one vote on the city council. It is to be considered a nonpartisan, issue-based position. Volunteering for state organizations helps the city as a whole which I do. Providing testimony on issues for the city is also volunteer but benefits our community. Counselor at Large is in community.

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BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

Audrey Thayer (continued)

Name a public leader you admire and explain why.

I was raised around with the efforts of Martin Luther King and Dalia Lama. I appreciate Senator Kunish for her efforts with MMIW and many other issues she stands for.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing?

Housing (lack of and care of current housing)
Transportation (availability for 24-hour service is needed)
Economic Development

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected?

Selecting just one of the issues is complex as are all interrelated in some way. Our city is economically challenged.

Continued using our tax dollars wisely with all the necessary infrastructure the City of Bemidji is responsible for maintaining. That includes housing.

Continuing the environmental and sustainability focus for transportation - there are options to promote.

Find creative ways to attract developers for housing and businesses

Moving legislation that goes directly to our City of Bemidji. The county has responsibility for our public and human services such as childcare, housing, dollars distributed on specific areas of need. I feel the balance is not equally given.

Public safety continues to challenge our city and is still important for our citizens.

To find a workable, creative, cost-effective plan for our unhoused community

Most importantly, to engage community nonprofits for all their important work that supports our city in so many ways.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers, if elected?

As an Indigenous woman, enrolled member of the White Earth Nation, I do not support data centers in any part of our natural beauty of northern Minnesota.

Many Northern Minnesota cities are experiencing tightening budgets. Where would you propose making cuts, if needed?

Tax levies must be kept low for the benefit of those unheard. Sanford Event Center to manage parts of this expensive endeavor by the city directly and not by expensive, outside management companies. To continue the work of people being educated just exactly how all of us together can take care of our city. Community engagement is critical.

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

Grace Wilder



Age on Election Day: 38
Community: Bemidji

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Currently employed as Digital Organizing Manager at HeadCount

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office.

Experience

- First started in political organizing in 2008 (for Obama campaign) as a precinct captain in Minneapolis
- Have since volunteered in various capacities for partisan and nonpartisan campaigns
- Since 2018, have worked full-time in voter engagement, including my current role as Digital Organizing Manager with HeadCount (<https://www.headcount.org/>)

Education

- Graduated from TrekNorth High School in 2007; took PSEO classes at BSU my senior year, then went to BSU for general education classes through December 2008
- Transferred to the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in

January 2009 and completed by BA in English in December 2011

- Completed a graduate certificate in nonprofit leadership and management at Arizona State University in 2020, earning the Woodside Community Changemaker Award for work to support voters with disabilities participate in elections

Why are you running? I decided to run after seeing little progress made in the past several years on numerous issues that significantly impact the quality of life of our family as well as many other residents of Bemidji. I want to do everything I possibly can to make this a place where people not just grow up or go to school and then leave, but a place where people stay because they love being here. The confluence of experiences as a new mother, a long-time resident of Bemidji, and as a professional working in the nonpartisan civic engagement space also compelled me to run for this seat this year. Upon seeing the other candidates for the At-Large position, and the makeup of our city council as it exists today, I felt it was extremely important to try to bring a new perspective and energy to our local government.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I have been a volunteer community organizer and mobilizer since 2008 and in professional civic engagement positions since 2015, and am deeply motivated to strengthen our community bonds through various projects within the council. I am eager to meet with constituents where they're at, literally and as it pertains to their concerns at the city

level. I have but one perspective on our city, and aim to learn as much as possible from other residents about how we can make Bemidji an incredible place to visit and live. I also intend to continuously educate myself about the communities and history of Bemidji to have a richer context for any policy proposals or decisions I make.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for. As a councilmember, my role would be to support in the setting of municipal policy; constructing, reviewing, and approving the annual city budget; crafting and enacting local ordinances; and providing oversight of the city manager. My most essential responsibility as an At-Large Councilmember would be to act as a representative of Bemidji constituents in city-wide matters.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. I respect and admire Paul Wellstone. He was a rural Minnesota activist and organizer, a grassroots campaigner, and championed environmental protection, labor groups, and health care reform.

(continued on page 20)

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE

Grace Wilder (continued)

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing?

1. Recovery from the June 2025 derecho storms, particularly the needed repairs to housing, 2. A dearth of childcare options,
3. A lack of coordination/action regarding much-needed parking and transportation improvements.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected?

The improvement of our city housing stock is my number-one priority. To tackle these improvements, I recommend tapping into city funds dating back to 1987 that could be used by landlords/renters as well as homeowners. I also think there are ways of adjusting requirements of landlords to make repairs to properties that have been left severely damaged in the wake of last year's derecho storm, and to ensure that renters have safe, quality housing moving forward.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers, if elected?

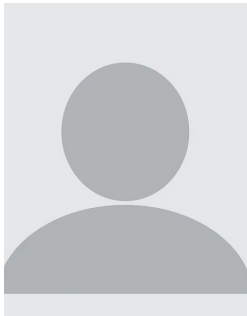
I think it would be important to fully understand the impact a data center would have on our city, if one were to be proposed to be built within city limits. There are pros and cons to this type of development, but I would want to have crystal-clear transparency from any data center developer of the environmental impacts, in particular. We are the first city on the Mississippi, in a state known for its lakes and natural beauty. It would be difficult to support a project that would detract in any way from these assets of our city.

Many Northern Minnesota cities are experiencing tightening budgets. Where would you propose making cuts, if needed?

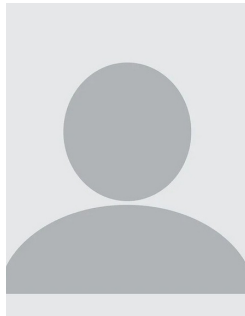
I would like to cut projects akin to the creation of the "Downtown Bemidji" sign and other vanity projects that do not directly support the residents of our city. While tourism is important, it is even more important to serve and retain those who choose to live here, and to make our city a place where people can find quality work, childcare, housing, transportation, and other foundational resources.

RED LAKE SCHOOL DISTRICT

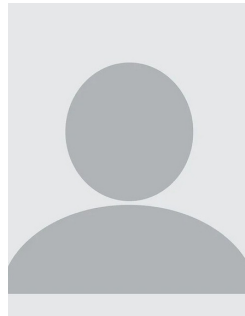
Voters can select up to four candidates.
The top eight vote-getters will advance to the November ballot.



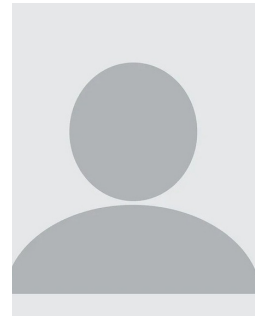
Fawn Beaulieu



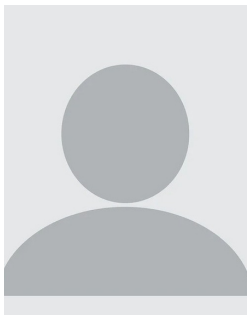
Vestanna Cook*



Nicole Desjarlait*
Incumbent



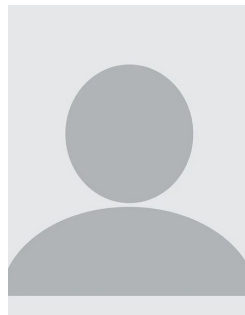
Ryan Holthusen*



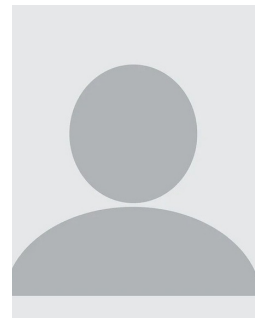
Christopher Jourdain
Incumbent



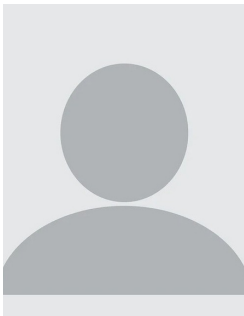
Sharon Kingbird



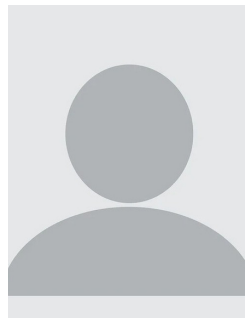
Deanna K. Lasley*



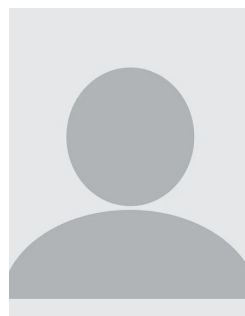
Ron Lussier*



**Deanna
Pemberton***



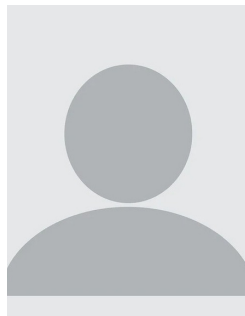
**Robert
Pemberton Sr.***



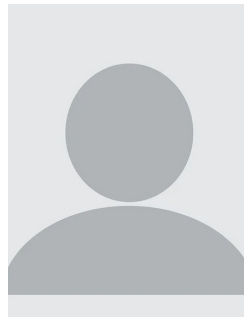
Linda S. Perkins*



**Jennifer
Schoenborn**

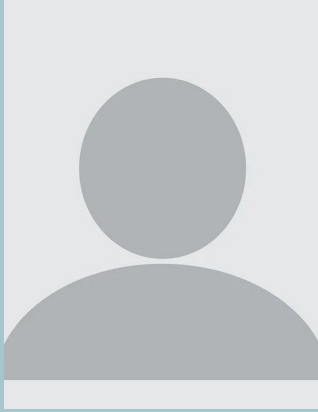


Tina Stately*
Incumbent



**Dustin Thunder-
Harris***

*Candidate did not
respond to KAXE's
survey.



Age on Election Day: 43
Community: Red Lake

Fawn Beaulieu

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I am one who works along side others to make sure that our students come first. My main goal while teaching these past few years was to make sure all students are reaching their full potential. I love empowering students to do their very best, I truly love our community.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for.

the role of school board members is to provide leadership, accountability, and oversee the school.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. Peggy Flanagan, We love her in Native Country! She is our Voice at a higher level.

What are your priorities, if elected? Please describe specific goals. With over three years of experience in education, I have seen firsthand the challenges many of our students face, including poor attendance, displacement from their families, and difficult life circumstances. These are real challenges that impact our students ability to learn and succeed.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your district, and how do you plan to address it if elected? I

believe one of the biggest challenges in our district is our schools having the support, resources and staffing needed to meet our students needs. I have seen firsthand the impact that staff shortages, attendances challenges, and limited resources have on both educators and students. I plan on listening to teachers, staff, students and their families and advocating for ways to strengthen systems in our schools.

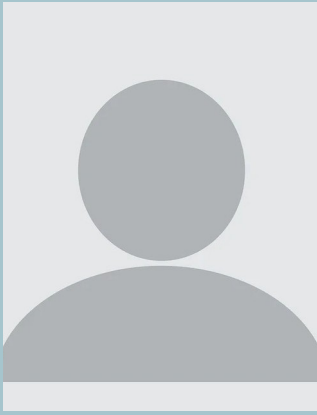
What is one success in the district that you would offer support for as a board member?

One success I would bring to the school board is my experience working in a school environment that successfully strengthened cultural identity, Seven Grandfather Teachings, and language revitalization. Being a teacher for the past three years, I have learned how important it is to put myself in spaces where I can continue to grow, learn, and advocate for our community of children. One day they will be sitting in these very seats and I want to help prepare them, Miigwech.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Endazhi-Nitawaaging Charter School.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. My experience as an educator has provided me with a strong foundation for serving on the school board. I have worked at Endazhi-Nitaawiging Charter School as an elementary school teacher, teaching students general education while also integrating Indigenous language, culture, and traditions into learning.

Why are you running? I have worked with students across multiple grade levels and I care deeply about the future of our students, families, and our community.



Age on Election Day: 51
Community: Little Rock

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Red Lake Comprehensive Health Services, School Wellness Counselor

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Serving on the board the past 4 years has helped me learn how to be an effective member, and implement some of my goals which included Ojibwe Language and Culture, along with renewable energy efforts.

Christopher Jourdain

I also like to stay in communication with the staff and students to make sure they are taken care of and feel valued.

Why are you running? To help improve our education system and help make an impact in the future of our community.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I believe I have the skills, vision, experience and knowledge to continue to be an effective board member.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for. Learning and implementing policies, making sure they are followed in school operations.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. I admire leaders who can connect with people, and get them to buy into a vision and work together to make it a reality.

What are your priorities, if elected? Please describe specific goals. Further support the Ojibwe Language and Culture department, support the staff and encourage the students to improve the graduation rate.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your district, and how do you plan to address it if elected? The graduation and attendance rates, I hope to be able to encourage and motivate students to learn the importance of their education.

What is one success in the district that you would offer support for as a board member? The fact that we have local control over our education system is powerful for us.



Sharon Kingbird

Why are you running? I am running for School Board because education matters. Every student who walks through our doors should feel welcomed, valued, and have a sense of belonging.

Our students deserve a safe, healthy learning environment where their well-being and educational goals are supported. Our teachers and staff also deserve the resources and training they need to do their best work - building relationships, empowering students, and honoring the unique identities of every child. This year, 41 students graduated - the largest graduating class since 2017. that is something our community can be proud of, and I want to see that success continue to grow. Every student should have the opportunity to experience the pride and accomplishment of reaching graduation.

It takes a village to raise our future generations. Through our language, culture, traditions, families and schools, we can help every student succeed.

Miigwech

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I

believe voters should choose me because I bring 32 years of experience in education and a genuine commitment to our students and families. I believe every student deserves a quality education and the support they need to reach their educational goals.

Strong schools are built on teamwork. That means open communication between our schools and families from

Early Childhood through 12th grade, working together to help every student succeed.

As your school board member, I will be approachable, supportive and ready to listen. I value your ideas, your concerns and your voice, and I will always do my best to represent our community with honesty and respect.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for.

The Officers approve minutes of the board meetings, they set policies, they listen to financial reports and program budgets, they vote on hiring and non-renewal of superintendent contracts and make decisions that also reflect the interest of the community members. This is only a few example of the roles and responsibilities of the board.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. Dr.

Anton "Waagosh" Treuer because of his efforts to revitalize the Ojibwe language, spirituality and culture. He is a great roll model for a whole generation of young Anishinaabeg. He is known for the many books that he has written on native culture and language and has presented at conferences and gatherings throughout the United States on this topic.

(continued on page 25)

Age on Election Day: 67

Community: Little Rock, Red Lake Mn.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Retired Ojibwe culturist teacher.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I have been in

education for the past 32 years, until May 2026, I was an Ojibwe culturist. My experiences/education include Ojibwe language and culture teacher in Red lake and Bemidji middle school, home/school advocate, parent committee member, mentor, reading tutor and attended National Indian Education Association and Minnesota Indian Education Association for several years. I have received my Ojibwe eminence license and psychology degree.

Sharon Kingbird (continued)

What are your priorities, if elected? Please describe specific goals.

My priorities are the students and being available to families and my goal is to have more contact with students and families. Another priority is to continue the rise in graduation rates, my goal is looking at and maintain what has been successful and work on what needs to be improved. Another priority are the many students who have left our district, I would like to identify who they are, gather data with the ultimate goal of retaining them back to our district.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your district, and how do you plan to address it if elected?

The biggest challenge to me is community and school communication. How this can be addressed is by a greater response time of communication between parents and school staff, having school/ community gatherings and possible student lead activities.

What is one success in the district that you would offer support for as a board member?

One success has been implementing Ojibwe language and culture into the classrooms, and throughout the building and I will continue to support and advocate for this success.



Age on Election Day: 42
Community: Red Lake

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? I work for Red Lake Comprehensive Health Services as a school based Wellness Counselor. I am also a Mental Health Practitioner on the Crisis Response team.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I have worked with the youth on the Red Lake Nation for almost two decades, in varying roles with in my community. I have been a school based Wellness Counselor at the Secondary Complex for over 10 years. I am passionate about supporting and advocating for our students. I work closely with school staff and have the unique opportunity to understand the policy and practices of the school District. I have always valued education, I was valedictorian

Jennifer Schoenborn

of my graduating class from Red Lake High School. I went on to get my Associates of Arts degree and have completed additional college classes towards finishing my degree. I also have my Community Health Worker certificate. I am able to organize public events.

Why are you running? I would like to serve my community further by being a school board member. I would like to be a voice for our youth, families and community members. I am strongly invested in my communities wellbeing and this extends to the school that educates them. I would like to share my idea's and knowledge to help guide the school districts educational policies. I want to represent my tribal community and support the school to reflect and honor our traditional values.

Why should voters choose you to advance to the general election? I would proudly represent our tribe and make sure our voices are heard. I am a very open minded person and am always listening to learn. I am non-bias and I work well with others. I am a good listener, a strong advocate and I am not afraid to speak up on issues. I am able to make tough decisions. I and my family are passionate about being involved with my community.

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of the office you are running for. As a school board member our role is to ensure school policy serves the students and community.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why. I admire Deb Haaland because she achieved many goals because of her hard work and dedication.

What are your priorities, if elected? Please describe specific goals. The graduation rate is low, I would like to understand why and help students over come barriers they may face to preventing them from being successful students and into adulthood. I would like to see the practices of the school come from a trauma informed lens to create a safe, caring and supportive environment. I want to see support and prioritization of student wellbeing with more drug and suicide prevention within the school district.

(continued on page 27)

Jennifer Schoenborn (continued)

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your district, and how do you plan to address it if elected?

I would like to see our graduation rate increase. Our students face many challenges. I believe improving the environment within the school so students feel understood, valued and truly supported will increase the number of students who make it to graduation. I would like to connect students and families to resources in the community and help them achieve educational goals.

What is one success in the district that you would offer support for as a board member?

It was wonderful to see the large graduating class this year. I believe a wonderful strength of the school currently is the access students have to mental health supports. Red Lake Comprehensive Health has grown their school based wellness counseling supports services. This is unique for students to have a large number of counselors and quick access to support. I would also like to see more of our children go to college and increased encouragement for continuing their education reflected in the school. I would like to see how the school board can help motivate students further their education after graduation.