

**WORTHINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL BOARD VACANCY SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

Candidate's Name: **Peter MacKenzie**

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Please answer all questions and send a completed questionnaire by January 16 via email to:

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1. Please state your professional or volunteer activities with K-12 education, either in the Worthington School District, another school district or in a private school.

I am a parent of two Colonial Hills students and I strongly believe that education begins at home and that as parents we have the unique opportunity to impart educational values and experiences upon our children. Active parental involvement in education is essential to a quality education. I am proud of my children, their academic accomplishments, and of their active involvement in school and community programs to date, and am looking forward to shepherding my children to greater heights.

My wife and I attended Worthington Schools kindergarten through graduation, 1987 and 1986 respectively. We both graduated from the Ohio State University (Cynthia in 1991 and I in 1994 after serving on active duty in the U.S. Army following High School). Each of us grew up in the district and benefited from our education here. In particular, as a member of Coach Gary Smith's Cross Country team, I learned the value of hard work, determination and teamwork.

Cynthia and I have stayed in Worthington for many reasons, and a quality educational opportunity for our children is one of the most important factors. Our community is unique to central Ohio; the confluence of a great city and a great school district, each with great histories. Our family is a member of, supporter of, and volunteers through the Colonial Hills PTA. I also regularly volunteer in my children's classrooms and, over the years, have visited several other classrooms throughout the district discussing earth science and business related material. I am, and have been for many years, registered in the Worthington School District speaker database.

I am an instructor for the Ohio Oil & Gas Energy Education Program (OOGEEP www.oogeep.org) and have participated in development and delivery of content for the Teacher Workshop Program. These workshops strive to expose primary and secondary teachers to the science that is used within the energy business. I am a "PetroPro" instructor for OOGEEP. The PetroPro program brings oil and gas industry professionals into K-6 classrooms with a fun presentation on energy.

For some reason rocks (geology and paleontology) and kids go together nicely. I don't know too many kids who do not have a rock collection of some kind or another. As a scientist/geologist I get a real kick out of the enthusiasm kids have for rocks and dinosaurs.

I also derive a great deal of pleasure volunteering as a Worthington Youth Boosters coach in a variety of sports (dating back to college and before I had children of my own). My philosophy of coaching strives to teach fundamentals, but also ensure that the game is fun. A little observation confirms that good play results in good fun, naturally.

2. What personal traits, skills, or experiences would you bring to the position that you feel would make you an effective board member?

A school board member shares the responsibility of one of the noblest causes in our country: the education of our youth. Generally, if a school board is prudent, level headed, and contemplative, there exists enormous opportunity to refine policy and goals to maintain excellence in education through challenging times.

As a Worthington graduate, living in the district nearly my entire life, I believe I bring an in-depth knowledge of the values of the community and the history of the district, its successes and its failures, its good times, and its bad times.

My service to our country on active duty in the U.S. Army is an accomplishment I am proud of. The organizational and leadership skills I obtained from that experience further strengthened me as a person, citizen, businessman, and family man, in many, many ways and instilled in me a sense of duty and responsibility to community.

My domestic career is one of risk analysis and management, many factors of which are intangible and dynamic. Success in the energy business requires long term goal planning and forecasting. I believe my experience in the energy business, having entered the field and succeeded during some of the most challenging economic times for the industry, has provided me with a strong set of tools to function as an effective school board member.

Business acumen, leadership, common sense, a forthright no nonsense approach, and fiscal prudence are a few traits that I have which will enable me to be a constructive and effective board member.

As you are aware, I have conducted a campaign for this position in the past. I am aware of the time, energy, financial requirements and commitments not only to conduct the campaign, but also to serve on the Board. I am now committing to organize, campaign, and stand as a candidate for the Board in November 2007.

3. What do you think is the most pressing issue in the Worthington Schools?

The most obvious answer here is the same for all school districts: school funding. The Worthington School District is no exception.

School funding issues manifest themselves in many ways and the most pressing issue for this district relates to declining enrollment, enrollment bubbles, and resource allocation, a problem currently showing itself in the middle schools. These are recurring issues which have a tendency to be controversial, and must be dealt with in a methodical, coherent, level headed, and decisive manner. Re-alignment of attendance boundaries, feeder patterns, and optimized building usage are strategic ways to address shifting attendance and declining enrollment and is a likely reality in the future.

However, the dominant issue in the near term may be labor related. Teacher contract talks are on the horizon. A significant portion of the budget is labor, and resolving contract negotiations in mutually beneficial ways will be necessary. To view any situation as solely an opportunity to save money is certainly short-sighted. I believe strongly that the principal value of our schools is our teachers and their individual and collective experience. I also believe that our district has one of the most sought after work environments for teachers in the country.

There are a plethora of critical issues, some reoccurring, some new, that the district will face. At the end of the day however, our success is determined by our ability to maintain a level of excellence while exercising fiscal responsibility.

4. If it were necessary to make substantial cuts in the expenditures of the district, what areas would you cut first, and what areas would you seek to preserve?

You win with people. Most of the annual budget expense is personnel; how fortunate for us that at the same time, teachers are one of our greatest assets. To overlook the teacher contract as a talking point is irresponsible. A great deal of energy will be expended in the course of teacher contract negotiations, and in the end there will be consensus.

Fundamentally, I do not believe that increased oversight and control create an environment of efficient and effective learning. Education is broader than the three R's. I am disappointed that, in recent years the ability of teachers to teach in their own unique ways has been diminished. Standardized testing certainly has a role in assessment for teachers, administrators, and school districts; however, to have a standardized test drive daily curriculum is unfortunate.

I would like to see increased building autonomy, reduced district administrative oversight, and a reduction of programs that require administration efforts to implement or oversee. Schools are interesting businesses. They are bottom-up institutions. The real action is in the schools themselves, teaching students, and that's why we are here. It seems common sense then that the money should be there too.

If cuts are necessary, administration is the place to start. In the past, programs like related arts have been cut to the detriment of the district.

5. If it were possible to add new programs to the district, what programs would you seek to add?

I would strengthen the related arts programs. As noted above, this element of our system which has been so strong in the past has been reduced too greatly.

I would institute an elementary foreign language program. It is no secret that young minds grasp language far more effectively than even a high school mind. Furthermore, as our world continues to shrink, language skills will continue to be valuable life skills.

I would work to improve health and wellness attitudes and education and continue to improve the quality of cafeteria food options.

In general, I would encourage programs which supplement and enhance the educational environment as opposed to programs designed to improve standardized test scores. Skilled thinking and test taking skills should be emphasized over implementation of test content driven curriculum. Widening the range of experiences available, art (in all forms), languages, other liberal arts type subjects, physical education, athletics, and extracurricular activities.

6. What do you see as the impact of “No Child Left Behind” on the Worthington Schools? What about the Ohio Core legislation?

I am firm believer of core subjects as a foundation of education, however, thinking skills are equally as important and thus a holistic approach to education is appealing to me. It is no surprise that education is a popular topic for political leaders; however, for our district, often the mandates are not relevant and a distraction from our goals and continuing potential.

While I believe that legislation such as the federal “No Child Left Behind Act” or the state Ohio Core legislation were well intentioned, I believe they do not positively influence our district and are failures. These laws have a negative impact – “lowering the bar” syndrome. Increased regulation and oversight have the tendency to lower the level of accountability at many levels. I think effective administrators know where the weaknesses in their areas are. We need to empower and support them as they work to improve the collective whole.

Numerous education groups are maintaining databases, studying, and actively lobbying congress to address some of the more blatant and functional problems of the Act.

Unfortunately as a district we must seek to meet the requirements of these encroachments on our process, because the Board is an agent of the State with respect to public education.

7. If selected, what do you see as your role in influencing state education laws and policies that affect the Worthington Schools?

The State is ultimately responsible for the education of its children. Practically speaking however, the State has ceded this responsibility to the districts, with limitations.

The successful candidate’s primary responsibility is to the district and the students within the district, working within the reality of the day. With that said, I continue to suggest that everyone try to pay a bit more attention to, react, and respond to the activities of the state legislature.

I think it is safe to say that most criticisms of any board are rooted in a lack of openness and poor communication between the board members and the board with the taxpayers.

8. What do you see as the roles and responsibilities of a school board member?

The responsibility of a school board member is to help the board to establish sound, clear, concise, and well thought out policy goals and objectives. These well reasoned and insightful policies, goals, and objectives are to cause the effective education of the children of the district.

Duty to the other members of the Board is another responsibility. The work of any board is to build consensus. Politics, personal feelings, and attitudes aside, a unified, committed board will be strong and effective.

Another important responsibility of the board is public relations, which is a challenge in any venture, and has been a particularly difficult challenge for the previous boards. Board members can play a significant role in communication of relevant issues to the community. Influencing state laws by keeping the public informed about the good things that the schools are doing, what great programs they offer, how the schools and their programs benefit the community at large, what programs they would like to offer to stay competitive with other schools and in the workplace, and how legislation and policies will effect the schools.

In short, the job of the board member is to help the board in the effective stewardship of public funds to educate the children of the district.

9. What evidence do you believe shows the Worthington Schools are adequately, or inadequately, preparing students for their lives after graduation?

Consistent top 20% performance on college entrance exams, top 5% ratings based on State assessments, consistent exceptional graduation rates, and exceptional college entrance rates, over extended periods of time.

The fact that we are a diverse and educated community explains the strong interest in the educational process and our district. Our community does not hesitate to get involved when necessary to assure that the board stays focused on their job of maintaining and improving the effective education of our children.

As witness to our excellent schools is the great number of residents who, like me, have stayed or returned to the district to raise their families. Furthermore, the fact that such a large percentage of our school employee families move to and reside within our district is another sign that we are doing something right.

Maintaining this elite status is our great challenge as a community.