

BARRINGTON 220
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
for

Barrington Education Association Endorsement Consideration

CANDIDATE PROFILE

Name Erin Chan Ding

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Campaign Committee Name: Erin for 220

Campaign Committee Address (if different): _____

Circle One _____

Incumbent _____ Non-incumbent : X

Past Elected Office(s) held: Newspaper Guild Local 22 (Detroit) Representative; Co-President, Asian American Journalists Association (Chicago Chapter); President, Asian American Journalists Association (Michigan Chapter); Co-Director Asian American Journalists Association National Freelance Affinity Group

Name of other organization(s) that you are a member of: _____

River City Community Church, American Society of Journalists and Authors and the Asian American Journalists Association

Occupation: Freelance Journalist and Editor

Educational background:

Bachelor of Science in Journalism with a double major in history with honors, magna cum laude, Northwestern University, Class of 2003 _____

Relationship with the school district (alumni, family, children attending etc):

Our son, Chandler Ding, attended North Barrington School for the Chinese Immersion program from Kindergarten through 2nd grade, Hough Street School for Extended Self Contained from 3rd through 5th grade and is now in 6th grade at Barrington Middle School, Station campus. Our daughter, Callie Ding, is in the 2nd-grade Chinese Immersion program at Countryside Elementary School.

Why are you running to be a member of the school board? What kind of impact do you hope to make?__First and foremost, I'm running for the Barrington 220 School Board because I love this community. I'm so grateful for how much teachers, staff and fellow families have cared for my kiddos, and I want to serve and give back. I have served on the executive board of a nonprofit organization and love the envisioning, reimagining and creativity the role entailed.

Second, I believe the temperature in our community has overheated in what has been an unquestionably difficult year for everyone. I want to do everything I can to bring kindness and respect back in the way we dialogue with one another. I think we need to tone down the blame and the anger. The uncertainty around how our children are going to learn because of the unknowns and the anxiety around the Covid-19 pandemic has been exhausting for everyone, and we need to recognize that the best solution for some families may not be the optimal or safest path for others. We need to exercise flexibility, compassion and understanding.

Third, I want to ensure voices that have often felt marginalized in District 220 are listened to and have influence in decision-making processes. We need to drastically improve representation when it comes to diversity of age, race, experience, class, thought and geography, particularly at levels of influence and decision-making. We have, for example, a student body at Barrington High School—a fairly good representation of the district—that is composed of more than 36 percent students of color, according to last year's Illinois Report Card via the Illinois State Board of Education. These numbers are not reflected when it comes to the composition of our

Board of Education, our staff (particularly at the superintendent and assistant superintendent levels) or our teachers.

When we don't have sufficient representation reflected throughout the district, it means stories go untold and inequity exists when people don't even realize it. I know it takes time for these numbers to change, and we must try our best to fill open positions with people who reflect our demographics so we can represent our communities in accurate and inclusive ways.

In another example, because I'm from South Barrington, if I am elected to the Board of Education, it's incumbent on me to seek out thoughts and listen to families from Carpentersville and Hoffman Estates and North Barrington to get a feel for what it's like to live in various parts of the district that may not be represented on the Board. These intentional questions and conversations help shine light on needs that exist throughout the district and beyond my own lived experience.

Also, as a child born in the Chicago suburbs to immigrants from Hong Kong and Guangdong, I rarely saw my story, my community's Asian American history and people who looked like me represented in curricula, at decision-making tables and among educational staff when I was growing up; I hope to play a role in making sure we're a district that is as inclusive as possible.

How do you feel about the public education system as it pertains to you and your family's educational needs?

I'll admit it: I did not grow up in public schools. My parents sent me to private, Christian elementary, middle and high schools, and I attended Northwestern University in Evanston, which is also private. My husband, however, had a wonderful experience in the public education system in Illinois for elementary, middle and high school.

When we bought our first home in the Chicago area, we moved to the Barrington School District in part because we loved the quality of education and the opportunity our son would have to be immersed in another language as part of his usual school day. So far, we've been delighted with the opportunities our kids have received in Barrington 220 and the care each of their teachers has shown to our kids. In so many instances,

Chandler's and Callie's teachers have treated them as if they were their own children, even giving them hugs (pre-Covid era) when they were filled with disappointment and having difficult conversations with them to help become more caring, responsible people. We're very pleased with the quality of education our children are receiving in Barrington and wish that kids all over America could experience this level of nurturing and care. _____

In general, how do you feel about public education? __ I feel grateful that in America, public education has become a right for our kids. I know it hasn't always been this way, and I feel it's essential that all of our children have the opportunity to access and attend quality public schools.

I also know our education system has been historically unequal--one only has to look at the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling and the two decades it took for its full implementation. [Segregation based on class and income](#) continues to persist based on funding that relies heavily on local taxes.

I'd like to explore how the State of Illinois can fill in some of these funding gaps, and I'd also like to find out how we, as a relatively well-funded school district, can be responsible and equitable with our resources. For instance, if we in 220 have a grant for free lunches for families that don't necessarily need free lunches, is there a way to redistribute those resources to a school district that has more need when it comes to feeding kids? Is there a way to steward technology well so that iPads or other expensive pieces of technology can be recycled or refurbished and then donated?

Last and perhaps most important, we have inequities in our own school district that need to be audited and explored, too. Dr. Cynthia Armendariz-Maxwell, for instance, shared with me how Sunnyhill Elementary School students don't have a busing option because of their geographic closeness to the school, but the school also has the highest percentage of families with one or fewer cars. In-person learning under a hybrid option doesn't seem like a choice for some of these families; what if, for instance, a parent must take the family's only car to work that day and does not have the capacity to pick up his/her/their child after 2.5 hours of school? Even without a hybrid schedule, as much as 1.5 miles seems a long way for a 5-year-old or 6-year-old student to walk if it's January, snowy and 10 degrees outside. Dr. Armendariz-

Maxwell told me that during one very cold winter, the school used Title I money to fund a bus, but doesn't that take away from funding for other resources and programming? I feel like there are ways to be more imaginative and nuanced in a situation like this and perhaps find ways to offer opt-in busing where and when it's needed.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths of our school district?

- Our schools! We know schools play vital roles in building healthy, strong communities, and I believe District 220's schools are our treasures. So much has been done in the last several decades to make them strong. We have so much to build on to make them even more equitable and dynamic for all the kids in our school district.
- The passing of the \$147 bond referendum in March 220 allows for much-needed facility updates at some of our educational sites.
- Programs for kids with demonstrated needs, such as those provided by the Early Learning Center and customized IEPs for kids throughout the 220 District, are huge assets for our families. These also included our extended programs, as well as Extended Self Contained, as kids with accelerated learning needs are often wired uniquely.
- Specialty programs, such as dual language and Chinese Immersion attract families to our district and have catalyzed not only kids' language and relational abilities but also expanded their global views and their cognitive functions. The fact that kids can opt into these programs as early as kindergarten gives them a huge advantage. (I speak Cantonese Chinese, but unlike becoming fluent in Spanish at a later age, I don't think I would've been able to pick it up had I not grown up listening to my parents speak it.)
- We offer an array of extracurricular options and activities, and we place a high value on music and fine arts.
- We have teachers who truly care about their students and communicate well with parents and families. Just about every family I've spoken with seems very happy with their kids' teachers. Also, teachers and staff have shown themselves to be accessible and responsive, answering emails or returning phone calls to address questions and concerns in reasonable time frames.
- Barrington's teachers have desires of their own to learn. To me, it appears as if they're using their summers and professional development days to research,

study and implement best practices for student learning. I recently learned that professional development funding has been cut in the past few years and that not all teachers always have a chance to go to conferences or engage in these extended opportunities, and I'd like to see a way for it to be budgeted back in--even in a rotating format--as teachers often come back from these workshops and trainings with valuable ideas they can share and implement throughout a school or department.

- Safety training of teachers and staff with regard to such emergency situations as natural disasters and active shooters have been forward-looking and helpful for our entire district. (It puts us parents at ease, too!) We're also one of the few districts in our area who have a community-coordinated response plan with direct communication capabilities among administration, staff and first responders. Maintaining great coordination and communication with our public safety officials is key to keeping our schools safe.
- Technology in our district has been a huge asset--and there have been pitfalls, too. Who knew when Barrington 220 launched the One to World program, when our son was in elementary school, that we would rely so heavily on it to educate him via remote learning in the middle of a global pandemic? The iPads have been vital for him and his younger sister, as well as for the thousands of kids in our district. However, the school-issued iPads are also, at times, the banes of our existence. It can't be healthy to have to rely on iPads for homework submission, quizzes and so much more even when there isn't a pandemic. I can imagine iPads are, at times, a major distraction in the classroom for teachers, and I've known other parents talk about headaches their kids are getting from too much screen time, as well. As an "Xennial" who remembers what life was like before it seemed every house had a PC, I think we can find a healthy balance between a life with screens and pixels and time with paper books and in-person games.
- The ability to negotiate a long-term contract with the BEA that includes fair compensation to full-time employees is key. Having a five-year contract with the BEA that is fair and beneficial for multiple parties gives stability to our school district. (Having been part of a newspaper guild in which we had to renegotiate our contract every two years, I can attest to this!) While we can work on other items like better compensation for substitute teachers, it's important to continue aiming for longer-term contracts with the BEA.

What, in your opinion, are the weaknesses of our school district?

- We need robust communication with the community, especially around finances, logistics and decision-making. Parents and families across the district don't seem to have a good grasp around what's being spent where and why; it also appears they're unclear on what the Board of Education does and why, as well as the scope of their power. We need to break all these pieces down into bite-size pieces and communicate them well. What if, in addition to using social media channels

to show the BOE honoring students and community members, we also posted short graphics and videos to break down Board decisions and processes for families? What would it look like for the BOE if it did everything it could to increase transparency and communication? This could also ameliorate the perception that the BOE is being persuaded by emotion and is doing studied, considered research before making decisions. Bolstering communication is also key to assuaging worries about financial stewardship.

- We lack representation at decision-making levels that's truly reflective of the student population and demographics of the district with regard to diversity of race, experience, age, class, geography and thought.
- We lack the ability or will for certain levels of the administration to be agile and handle nuance. For instance, what if a family, as Dr. Cynthia Armendariz-Maxwell mentioned to me, lives within the 1.5-mile radius of the local school but doesn't have a means for transportation (such as one or fewer cars)? What if a family had cars but would rather pay an extra fee so their young child doesn't have to trudge through traffic in a snowstorm? What if the school district is reopening all schools but one area has a particularly high concentration of multi-generational homes with relatively less square footage, making family members more susceptible to contracting Covid-19? We can't make blanket policy decisions at the Board level or in the administration and assume they're optimal or even safe for all families, particularly in the time of a pandemic.
- We need to make equity and fairness a driving force in all decision-making. For instance, have we considered a variety of bids and options from different geographies and backgrounds before accepting them? Have we cast as wide of a net as possible? Are we only using suppliers we're accustomed to using? What opportunities do we have when soliciting RFPs to be a more equitable, fair and inclusive District 220? What can we do with hiring and open positions to ensure we're interviewing people who are reflective of our communities? How can we encourage programming and holistic education at every level that expands our historical and social narratives and is inclusive as possible?

How would you consult and partner with the BEA on issues pertaining to public education in Barrington 220?

I know the majority of us parents are incredibly thankful for each of our children's individual teachers. Each one who has taught or coached our kids show enormous care for them and want to see them excel. However, I'm concerned about how much teachers' opinions and voices are valued and listened to at the decision-making levels in our district, particularly when it comes to the Board of Education

and certain levels of administration. From my observation, it appears the Board of Education relies heavily on reports from the superintendent, which is understandable, as the superintendent is accountable to the Board. I find myself often wondering, teachers, what teachers are thinking about certain decisions.

I think it would be helpful for Board members to hold regular--perhaps quarterly--listening sessions with representatives of the Barrington Education Association to gauge the opinions of teachers when it comes to making key decisions. I feel this is especially vital when it comes to decisions the Board makes around working environments and student learning. Teachers should be involved, and their opinions sought from the time a Board committee studies an issue relevant to them, and their voices need to be represented in the full Board discussion, as well.

To help with this, could there be a liaison from the BEA to the BOE and vice versa, for when the BEA executive board is discussing matters in which it may want a BOE perspective? I've had several conversations with teachers since deciding to run for the BOE, and I'm concerned that far too many teachers feel as if they're finding out about key decisions when the rest of the community learns about them. At a minimum, when decisions affect the way teachers are going to educate kids or when teachers will need to work out processes and figure out classroom logistics, teachers should be given a heads up and walked through forthcoming plans. I feel like more consistent, clear communication channels between the BOE and the BEA, as well as inclusion in key decision-making processes, will help teachers feel like they're true partners in the education of our kids.

Do you have ideas/changes that you would like to see instituted in our school district?

Please explain: _

In addition to the ideas I mentioned above, many of them delineated under "weaknesses," I believe we need to take a detailed look at transportation in our school district. Transportation does, after all, compose the biggest part of our

operating budget, and we need to ensure that it is fair, safe and equitable for all of our families. I'd like to do a transportation audit and pay particular attention to communities that have been told bus transportation is not an option for them and explore if opt-in busing could be a possibility. (This would affect not just Sunnyhill but schools like Hough and Grove, too, and all other families who may want different options when it comes to transportation.)

We also need more dynamic ways of seeking intentional community and parent input before making districtwide decisions that have impacts large and small. Sometimes, people aren't paying attention to agenda items or committee discussions they may otherwise want to know about. Often, the Board needs to be intentional about bringing these topics to the community. What if we held regular listening sessions around certain topics? (These could be over Zoom or another virtual medium for now, of course.) What about asking the BEA and some PTO representatives to give quarterly updates at Board of Education meetings so there's higher touch between the Board and what's going on at each school? I realize the superintendent is the sole employee of the District, yet that one person won't be able to capture the nuances of what's going on at each educational site. We need easy ways to access key decisions and information from the BOE that don't involve a community member needing to sign into an entire YouTube session of a Board meeting and trying to find relevant information.

I love that we have so much access to technology, and while I'm so appreciative of the One to World program, particularly this year when distance learning has been essential, I'd like to explore what it means to strike a healthy balance between technology and time away from pixelated screens. The iPads have become so vital for homework, test-taking and communication that I wonder if an over-reliance on them is having detrimental effects on our kids. At the very least, I think we need to have regular conversations about iPad boundaries and best practices, particularly around time limits, screen-free environments and social media.

I also think that, as we eventually return to more typical, in-person, five-day attendance learning, we need to work with our school counselors, psychologists and teachers to implement rigorous screening for kids who may have experienced higher-than-average amounts of learning loss. The fact is [learning loss is real](#) during this Covid-19 pandemic, even for kids receiving the highest quality remote education, and

we need to identify which kids need additional assistance catching up and make this help tangible and accessible.

I'd also like to reiterate how much I'd like to see equity as a driving force in all of our decision-making: in seeking bids, in hiring staff and teachers, in encouraging programming and holistic education and in doing everything possible to expand our historical and social narratives to make our community of learners as inclusive as possible. At the very core, I want to work with and collaborate with the BEA and community partners to give each student in every part of our district an equitable, safe, inclusive, challenging and fun education.

Date: December 27, 2020 **Signature:** X Erin Chan Ding (Electronic signature; if you'd like, I can also email you a hand-signed PDF.)

Please return the completed questionnaire no later than December 27th, 2020

to the attention of Megan Bartlett at region64gpa@gmail.com