

## **Express News Q&A**

**Dr. Nina Christensen( incumbent)**

**Menomonee Falls School District President**

***1) Personal information: How long have you been a resident of the village? What is your professional and educational background? What past experience do you have serving in elected positions or community organizations?***

Over the past 16 years, my husband and I have lived and raised our children in Menomonee Falls. We are incredibly proud to be a part of this close-knit community and call it our home. It has truly been a wonderful place for our family to grow and thrive.

However, I am not a native of the Midwest but moved here in 1995. I graduated from the University of California, San Diego, with a double major in Biology and Psychology. I continued my education in Chicago and earned my doctorate in 1999. My career path has led me to work at several Veterans Hospitals and medical facilities, and ultimately to own my practice, which has been incredibly fulfilling.

Throughout my career, I have dedicated my life to being of service to others, both professionally and personally. I am a business owner, a medical professional, and a passionate volunteer. Over the years, I have worked with several nonprofit organizations, including TeamLift Inc., which built a school to house and educate approximately 350 disadvantaged girls in Malawi. Recently, we expanded the initiative to include medical clinics. I feel privileged to be part of this work.

Also, I founded a nonprofit organization focused on serving at-risk veterans and first responders. We rescue dogs, train them, and donate the service dogs to local heroes. It is incredibly powerful to witness the healing a dog can bring to someone in need. The bond between a service dog and a hero is truly transformative.

Since 2021, I entered a new chapter in my life with a different perspective and purpose. It became clear that it was time to apply the same commitment, compassion, and dedication I've shown in my career to our children, who are our greatest and most valuable investment. In 2022, I was humbled to be elected to a seat on the Menomonee Falls School Board, where I currently serve as the school board president. This role has been the most fulfilling of all, as the decisions I make have a long-lasting impact on the future of our children and

community. I am proud of what we have accomplished during my first term and look forward to continuing this important work.

## ***2) Why are you seeking re-election to the Menomonee Falls School Board?***

In my first term, the board made significant strides in enhancing the educational experience for our students, supporting our teachers, and fostering stronger community involvement. We focused on initiatives to boost academic achievement and expand educational opportunities, ensuring every child has the needed resources to succeed. Our district made key investments in school safety, hired more teachers, launched a \$9 million capital project with no additional debt, and allocated \$1 million for new curriculum—all while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

While I am proud of our progress, there is still much to accomplish. Our momentum is strong, and I remain committed to continuing this important work, ensuring our schools remain places where every student can thrive. Working alongside dedicated educators, staff, parents, and students has been an honor. Below are key accomplishments we have achieved together:

### **District Leadership:**

- Hired Superintendent Munoz, whose leadership has exceeded expectations.
- Initiated a 5-year Strategic Plan and a 10-year Capital Plan.

### **Finance and Operations:**

- Maintained a balanced budget, ensuring fiscal stability.
- Retired non-referendum debt, saving \$500,000, redirected to resources for students and staff.
- Mill rate was the second lowest in 30 years, without sacrificing educational quality.
- Launched a \$9 million capital project to expand our community center and elementary school, with no debt or referendum.

### **Teachers and Staff:**

- Hired additional teachers to reduce class sizes and to enhance the quality of education for our youngest learners.
- Hired new Associate Principals for both elementary and middle schools to provide additional leadership support.
- Enhanced staff benefits, including improved dental coverage, contributions to HSA and increased retirement contributions.
- Offered early retirement benefits for long-term staff.

### **School Safety:**

- Appointed a Director of Student Services and School Safety to implement crisis management plans and ensure building-specific safety protocols.
- Hired a third resource officer to increase safety at schools.
- Installed additional security cameras and upgraded front entrances, fortifying our safety infrastructure.

### **Curriculum:**

- Approved and purchased \$1 million in new ELA and Social Studies curriculum to ensure high-quality learning materials.

### **A Vision for the Future:**

Looking ahead, I envision Menomonee Falls as a leader in educational excellence—a community where every student has the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. Together, we will continue to improve our schools, enhance student outcomes, and create a brighter future for all our children.

### ***3)What are the two to four key issues facing the district and what is your approach to them?***

Our district has greatly benefited from Superintendent Muñoz's leadership, which allowed us to reorganize and strategically prioritize our spending. Through these efforts, we have maintained our commitment to supporting students and staff while upholding fiscal responsibility. We focused our investments on critical areas such as student achievement, safety, and teacher support, ensuring our decisions align with our long-term objectives.

However, one of the key challenges facing school districts is effectively allocating funds without compromising the quality of education. A particular area of concern is the funding for special education (SPED). During my time on the school board, I've gained valuable insight into how funding is allocated. Each year, we are provided with a designated percentage of funding; however, due to the funding formula, the actual amount our district receives is often lower than expected. This creates a significant burden, as districts must budget a year in advance, and any shortfall requires us to find additional resources to make up the difference.

This ongoing challenge places considerable strain on the district's ability to meet the needs of all students, especially those requiring special education services. SPED students are among the most vulnerable and have the greatest need for support, yet they are the most affected by this funding gap.

In my next term, I will advocate for a real-time increase in SPED funding with state legislators. Our district is committed to serving all students, but we cannot do so effectively if the state allocation does not match the percentage initially approved. The lack of proper funding limits the services we can provide to our most in-need students, and it is something that must change. It is essential that we receive the funding we are promised to ensure that all students, particularly those in special education, receive the services and support they deserve.

Also, our district was long overdue for an update to the ELA and Social Studies curriculum. We took a major step forward and invested \$1 million last year. The new curriculum has already made a noticeable impact on student achievement, particularly in reading. As we continue to implement and refine these materials, we're seeing positive changes in student performance. The progress we have made this past year reflects our commitment to improving the quality of education and ensuring that every student has the resources they need to thrive.

***4)What else do you want voters to know that I haven't previously brought up?***

My journey onto the school board was driven by my desire as a mother to ensure the best education for our children. As I became more involved, I noticed a shift: core subjects like math, reading, and writing were overshadowed by a focus on social issues. While important, these topics diverted attention from foundational subjects essential for student success. I ran for the school board to break the status quo and advocate for change.

In my first term, I committed to fiscal responsibility and common-sense decisions focused on core educational values. We turned around a potential \$1.7 million operational referendum to become fiscally sound. I worked to ensure spending benefited students and staff and not unnecessary bureaucracy while advocating for age-appropriate content and respecting parental rights in teaching family values at home.

Serving this district has been an honor, and my commitment to this community has been steadfast. I believe I have served with integrity and dedication. Unfortunately, some have disagreed with my approach and have taken it upon themselves to launch attacks against me, aiming to tarnish my reputation. As the first Vietnamese woman serving as a school board president, I had hoped to be celebrated for my efforts and perspective. Instead, I was disparaged and my minority status marginalized because my values did not align with the prevailing ideals of inclusion and diversity that some claim to champion. Furthermore, despite the vocal opposition from those who disagree, my actions concerning board duties and district matters have aligned with the law and the established practices for my role.

Despite those challenges, I have remained dedicated and focused on the work and stand proudly behind the district's accomplishments. Throughout this term, I have fought tirelessly for what's best for the schools, students, and staff. My focus has always been on serving the needs of all children and ensuring a better future for every student, no matter their background. We prioritized spending and curriculum with a focus on safeguarding children's innocence and their educational development. We improved community engagement through our strategic plan and increased transparency by recording all board and committee meetings.

I've stayed true to my mission of making decisions in the best interest of the district. Although some have sought to undermine these efforts, real progress has been made that is visible and impactful. If you share the belief to continue this path, I would be honored to earn your vote.