

NEWS LOCAL

2 more candidates for Duluth School Board step forward

Valerie Joeckel is running for a seat representing central Duluth. Stephanie Williams is running for a seat that represents the district at large.



Stephanie Williams, left, and Valerie Joeckel. Contributed / Stephanie Williams and Valerie Joeckel



By **Joe Bowen**

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DULUTH — Not quite a week before [local Democrat-Farmer-Labor leaders meet](https://www.duluthdfl.com/endorsing-convention-2023) to endorse candidates ahead of November's elections, two more candidates for the Duluth School Board have stepped forward.

Valerie Joeckel, a family coach for a local nonprofit that serves homeless families and longtime advocate for unhoused people in the Duluth area, is running for the District 3 seat that represents central Duluth.

Stephanie Williams, a business adviser for the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund and one of the founders of the BIPOC Business Directory that launched last year, among other achievements, is running for an at large seat that represents the whole school district rather than a district.

FROM 2022: Northland BIPOC businesses featured in new directory(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/business/northland-bipoc-businesses-featured-in-new-directory>)

Oct 3, 2022

(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/business/northland-bipoc-businesses-featured-in-new-directory>)

Both are seeking DFL endorsements.

The board seat Joeckel is seeking is occupied by Paul Sandholm, a retired Duluth teacher who was first voted to the board in 2019. Sandholm told the News Tribune that he does not plan to run for reelection.

Joeckel said she used to be homeless, and that she believes the board could use a representative with that sort of life experience.

“I have a unique position where I’ve gone from homeless to housed, and now I’m in a position where I house the homeless,” Joeckel

said. “It is a unique perspective to have in light of the other experiences that are represented on the board.”

Joeckel said she was encouraged to run last month. “I looked into it a little bit, thought about it, and took the encouragement as a good sign that someone else thought I might be a good fit,” she said.

Williams, who is Black and said she’s been an advocate for the BIPOC community for years, said she’s passionate about advancing students of color.

“I know that the graduation rates for people of color in the city of Duluth is not great,” she said. “We need representation on the school board. We need to be in the room where decisions are being made. Our kids, my community, we need a voice, and it’s been a while since we’ve had someone that looks like me on the board. And so I want to ... be the change.”

SEE ALSO: Duluth graduation rate rebounds(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/local/duluth-graduation-rate-rebounds>)

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After a sizeable dip, the school district’s Class of 2022 posted a 76% four-year graduation rate, a 5% increase that puts it back in line with prepandemic figures.

Williams announced her candidacy on Facebook on Tuesday.

The at large seat for which Williams is running is occupied by Alana Oswald, another former district employee who announced her reelection plans on Facebook in early February. Oswald has held that seat since 2015, and is also seeking a DFL endorsement.

"It's always good for voters to have a choice to compare and contrast," Oswald said Wednesday.

(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/local/candidates-for-duluth-school-board-emerge>)

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Incumbent Alanna Oswald is seeking a third term representing the district as a whole. Sarah Mikesell is pursuing a board seat that represents eastern Duluth.

Also running for a board seat is Sarah Mikesell, who works in the quality management department at St. Luke's hospital. Mikesell is running to represent District 2, which encompasses many of Duluth's eastern neighborhoods. She, too, is seeking a DFL endorsement.

The incumbent is David Kirby, a retired physician who was first elected in 2015. He is not seeking reelection.

Candidates will be able to formalize their run for office when the filing period for school board elections opens later this month. That period is May 23 through June 6.

School district and city elections are scheduled for Nov. 7.

A map outlining Duluth Public Schools' voting districts, including the changes to them school board members approved in April 2022. Gary Meader / Duluth News Tribune

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