



Meet the Rolla Public School Board Candidates

Election 3 April 2012

Tom Sager



Tell voters a little about yourself, such as your occupation, education and family.

My name is Tom Sager. I will be 70 years old by Election Day. I am married to Helen Messerly. We have four children (two each) and ten grandchildren. One of our grandchildren is a graduate of Rolla High School; five are currently attending Rolla Public Schools. We are raising one grandchild together. He is in 7th grade at Rolla Middle School.

I have lived 30 years in the Rolla area and worked at UMR (now Missouri S&T) as professor of computer science until my retirement 12 years ago. I worship at the Islamic Center of Rolla, Missouri.

I have several hobbies: writing, photoshop cartooning, and political activism; but my most rewarding and enjoyable hobby is working with young children. I have been a volunteer in Rolla Public Schools, mostly at Mark Twain

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Why do you want to serve on the Rolla School Board? And, what qualities/qualifications would you bring to the board?

Rolla has an excellent school district; but there is room for improvement. During the years I've volunteered in the public schools, I've noticed several areas where we can improve. They will be discussed below.

I have a lifetime of experience as an activist, an innovator and an educator. I organized the ONLY formal opposition to the 1997 Rolla City Charter which would have opened the door to a city-wide income tax which could have been assessed on anyone who worked in the City of Rolla whether a resident or not. We defeated this charter by 7 percentage points. More recently, I was active in the 2009 fight against Rolla's Enhanced Enterprise Zone which will take tax revenue belonging to the school district and give it away to private interests.

If elected, I would bring to The School Board a spirit of activism and public service.

Tom Sager

What do you consider are the three most pressing issues facing the Rolla Public School District?

The most pressing issue for the Rolla Public School District, and indeed for most school districts today, is to defend itself from the increasingly vicious assaults on public education coming from politicians and others who stand to gain by mandating public ignorance. These attacks come in the form of budget cuts, insistence on evaluating students, teachers, and school districts on the basis of inappropriate standardized testing, and demanding that public schools teach nonsense instead of science, hype instead of history, and spin instead of social studies. Assaults also include attacks on teacher tenure and job security and the increased privatization of schools at public expense.

To give you an idea of just how vicious these politicians are, every year our school district is forced to send out letters

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What do you consider the School Board's main role in the school district?

The School Board should be neither a micromanager nor a rubber stamp. The Board must set the direction for the school district, aggressively gather and analyze pertinent data and make all major decisions. Everything that goes on within the school district is ultimately the responsibility of The School Board.

What would you hope to accomplish if you are elected?

Here are a few areas in which I believe the school district could improve:

1. Expand volunteer program

The Rolla School District has an excellent volunteer program. I would like to see it expanded. Our schools belong to all residents of the district and the education of our children should be a matter of concern for all of us. Personally, I have found nothing more rewarding than working one on one with a child who is way behind in reading and watch the child catch up and sometimes even surpass their peers. We have many excellent teachers; but they simply do not have

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How would you improve the work the board does for the Rolla School District?

There is no substitute for observation and participation. I have spent many hours volunteering at Mark Twain Elementary School working with some outstanding teachers, helping some fantastic children learn to read. I would like to do something similar at Rolla's other schools too. I think this is the best way to learn about the needs of The School District and how to improve it.

I am retired, so I would have time to do this.

Tom Sager

Tell voters a little about yourself, such as your occupation, education and family. *continued...*

Elementary, for eight years; and at First United Methodist preschool since 2002. I read to preschool children; and I help and encourage elementary school age children to become better readers.

For more information about me: Visit my website, www.tomsager.org, email me at tom (at) tomsager.org, or phone me at 573-368-5551.

What do you consider are the three most pressing issues facing the Rolla Public School District?

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proclaiming absurdities like, "Of the ten accountability groups at [Rolla Middle School] none met [adequate yearly progress] requirements." Our schools are NOT failing. It is our politicians who are failing. Congress, most of whose members have little or no experience in education, has a public approval rating of 13% (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/01/congress-hits-a-new-low-in-approval-obama-opens-election-year-under-50/>). By what Right do they make such absurd and costly demands on our schools?

As a private citizen, I have opposed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) since its inception in 2002. I will continue to oppose NCLB and its successors such as Race to the Top. Local school districts should also take a stand against these assaults and fight back.

See question 5, below, (What would you hope to accomplish) for other not quite so pressing issues.

What would you hope to accomplish if you are elected? *continued...*

the time to work one on one with children in need of individual attention. I want to see more people helping out. 30 minutes a week can make a huge difference in a child's life.

2. Encourage innovation

I would like to see our teachers encouraged to search for innovative ways to teach, particularly where classical methodologies are not producing adequate results. This cannot be done unless teachers have adequate job security. Should our State Legislature be vindictive enough to gut current statutes on tenure and teacher's job security, I would like to see the Rolla School Board adopt a local policy at least as strong as the current statewide policy. Teachers cannot be innovative if they and their school are evaluated according to standardized tests which represent someone's simplistic idea of what children ought to know. I would like to see our school district opt out of these requirements to whatever extent possible.

3. Fundraising

Fundraising from the general public is important; but I have strong issues with some of the ways it is done, particularly with children going door to door selling things that are purported to benefit the school district.

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Tom Sager

What would you hope to accomplish if you are elected? *continued...*

I have yet to be visited by a child who could answer this simple question: If I buy something from you for ten dollars, how much of that will your school get? If children are going to sell things for the benefit of their school, I would like them to be able to answer this question. The request ought to be phrased something like this:

"My name is [child's name] and I am raising money for [child's school] to [description of project]. You can help by buying [description of products]. My school will receive [how many] percent of whatever you buy. If you prefer, you can make a tax-deductible donation by writing a check to [child's school] with donation in the memo line. In this case, [child's school] will receive your entire donation for [name of project]."

If children are to receive rewards, they should either be based on the amount raised rather than what is sold, or far better, be about the same for all participating children. (Keep in mind that it is not a level playing field. Some children have better access to adults with money to spend than others.) As a side note: I once gave a check to a child made out to her school that never got cashed. Apparently, since she would get no rewards for the donation, she simply disposed of it.

I would like to see the school board explore alternative ways to raise money than having children sell things. I have a few ideas.

4. Deliver higher quality education for less

The School Board should aggressively search for ways in which we can deliver a higher quality education for less money. One way that I believe this could be done is in the area of textbooks. Our district spends hundreds of thousands of dollars annually on textbooks. I believe, particularly in fast-changing areas like science, textbooks can be an impediment to learning, as material can be out-of-date before it's published, and textbooks tend to follow what is considered "politically correct" which is often scientifically false.

I would like to explore replacing some textbooks with less expensive online materials that can be updated quickly. Particularly in science, Rolla has an excellent resource at Missouri S&T, which I believe is underutilized.

I would like to see money saved in other areas, put into increasing teacher salaries.