

Davis Education Association
2010 Utah State School Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire

Nicole Toomey Davis

www.Nicole4Education.com

blog.Nicole4Education.com

Twitter: @Nicole4Edu

Nicole@Nicole4Education.com

Facebook: [Nicole4Education](#)

Mobile: 801-550-6642

1. Please tell us a little about yourself and why you have filed to run for the Utah State School Board of Education.

I have a strong background in organizing, leadership, management and vision along with an extensive knowledge of the legislative process and relationship with the Governor's office and key legislators, which I think gives me the unique ability to hit the pavement running to serve the citizens of District 5 and the State of Utah, as a member of the Utah State Board of Education.

I am businesswoman, community contributor, mother of two in Davis County schools and wife of 19 years, and I currently serve as the Director of the Centers of Excellence Program for the Governor's Office of Economic Development, recruited to bring my experience as an entrepreneur to help University companies get their products to market more quickly. When recruited to GOED, I negotiated flexible hours (with correspondingly flexible compensation) that allows me sufficient time to serve well on the State Board of Education.

I am also the President and CEO of Enclavix, LLC, a small Bountiful-based technology development and consulting company and I am the former President, CEO and co-founder of DoBox, Inc., a leading provider of parental control solutions for homes and families, acquired by Netopia and, subsequently, Motorola.

Of all the work that I do, my children and their future are always uppermost in my mind, which is a key reason that prompted me to run for the State Board of Education.

I am a long time community supporter, and either currently serve or have served on several community and non-profit boards including: has served in a variety of capacities on community boards including:

- Currently on the Advisory Board for the Women Tech Council to support women in technology-related fields
- Former Officer of MountainWest Capital Network (MWCN), helping build a strong financial environment for new high-growth companies
- Board of Trustees, Utah Technology Council (formerly UITA), 2003-2009 and currently co-chair of that organization's Emerging Executive Peer to Peer forum
- Volunteer work during the 2003 legislative session, working on the Utah Venture

Capital Enhancement Act, to increase the available supply of venture capital for promising Utah companies

- Trustee for StageRight TheaterCompany for 5 years, helping deliver “Classic Theater at a Classic Price” to Utah

I have been honored to have been recognized by my colleagues in a number of ways, including:

- Recent Utah Business profile, April 2010, “Alumni Women to Watch”
- Women Tech Council, 2009, [Community Builder award](#)
- [BYU Magazine Winter 2010](#), profiled with other Women Tech Council award recipients
- [Utah CEO Magazine Profile](#), 2009
- Connect Magazine, 2007, I was named among the 25 most influential business leaders in Utah
- [vSpring v|100, \(Top 100 Venture Entrepreneurs in Utah\)](#) selected 2004-2006, 2008-2010
- Utah Business Magazine, February 2006, "40 under 40" list of Utah's Rising Stars

I have held key positions in marketing, business development and strategy with international companies located in Utah, Illinois, Santa Clara, CA, and spent the first two years of my career working in New York City for France Telecom, speaking French at the office. I earned a BS in Electrical Engineering from Brigham Young University and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. I am a published author, with textbook contributions and press articles to my credit.

With my passion for state government, technology and especially my strong desire to see the children of our state receive the excellent education they need and deserve, I would be honored to represent the citizens of District 5 as their board member on the Utah State Board of Education.

2. What kinds of experiences have you had with the public schools? (children in school, volunteering, etc.)

I have two daughters who are both students in the Davis School District. We moved back to Davis County 2 years ago (after living here previously for nearly 7 years), and have really been pleased with the quality of teaching and the schools here and have enjoyed opportunities to work in the classroom. We are also keenly aware of the constraints facing teachers and work hard to provide tangible support and supplies to help these classrooms thrive.

One of our daughters has been in both the neighborhood classroom and part of the Spectrum program for advanced learners, which has given us a lot of insights into curriculum issues and classroom dynamics. We also have family and friends who are

teachers, and see firsthand the opportunities and challenges that they experience working in the education field.

My husband, a computer scientist, and I, an electrical engineer / MBA, both were educated in public schools and we believe that our children should be able to earn a great education in the public schools in Utah.

3. What, in your opinion, is the main mission of public education?

To prepare our children for a bright, vibrant, successful future that includes personal, family, professional and social contributions and satisfaction. We must fulfill this mission for all of our children, from those who struggle or are disadvantaged to our most advanced students.

The ability to be strong citizens is a very important outcome of education. One reason that I am such a strong supporter of math and science education is that many of the pressing social questions of our time have, at their root, scientific or mathematical data or assumptions, and the ability to make good decisions requires understanding that data.

4. Do you believe that public schools are adequately funded? If you do not believe they are adequately funded, what changes should be made to provide appropriate financial support for quality public schools?

Of course not, currently almost every state program is feeling the sting of budget cuts. Teachers feel that they are being asked to do more with the same or less, because they ARE! These are difficult times.

In these tough economic times, all of us have to do the best we can with the resources we have. The current situation, such as lack of funding for growth in enrollment, is extremely difficult for schools to manage and is stressful for teachers, administrators, students and parents.

At the same time, citizens of our state are seeing significant reduction in income/ underemployment, or are losing their jobs and even their homes. Thankfully, Utah is doing better than other states, with an unemployment rate more than 2% lower than the national average. For example, this translates in over 20,000 MORE workers with jobs and income than Utah would have if our unemployment rate matched the national average (currently over 9.5%). Still, the taxpayers who support education are facing many financial challenges and much uncertainty. Raising taxes in this situation could more families "over the edge" financially. This type of financial stress is much harder on families, and particularly on children, than funding challenges in the education system.

I have heard others suggest that we raise taxes on businesses. Businesses are not "pots of money", they are groups of individuals - owners, managers and employees - meeting their own challenges in a fiercely competitive global economy. When business taxes go up, fewer funds are left for companies to hire employees or make purchases - thereby hurting the very families and children we want to help. This is especially true in Utah where the vast majority of our businesses are small businesses, often employing a few or only 10's of people, and as such very susceptible to economic turmoil.

Together we have to be as creative and supportive as possible until the economy begins to turn around. Research indicates it will be two years after the end of a national recession before state budgets begin to improve – therefore I expect that we will face another two budget cycles of financial challenges before things begin to significantly bounce back in terms of budgeting.

At the same time, I view this difficult period as an opportunity to see what creative solutions teachers and principals might invent that could dramatically improve our education system. I highly value the creativity and strength of great teacher and principles, they are the core of a great education. As an entrepreneur, I know from (hard)experience, that the toughest times often bring the most amazing creativity.

5. What do you see as the three most critical need/issues facing the State School Board and Utah public schools in the next five years? How would you begin to address these issues?

Issue 1: We are losing too many of our children who fail to graduate, and when they do graduate, too many are not ready for either the workforce or for college level work.

Focus 1: Strengthen our commitment to both core curriculum and to science and mathematics, including the rigors of logical thinking and analysis. We must maintain and slowly improve our historically strong teaching in the reading and language arts. Strengthen the mentorship of young people and at risk students by inviting people from the business community to speak to students and give them a perspective that is different than their immediate family or community. Many children's lives have been changed by 'catching the vision' of education.

Issue 2: Increasing polarization in the “education discussion”. Too many factions point fingers at “others” and too few are committed to working together for solutions. There are no “good people” or “bad people” in the education discussion, there are just people with different, strongly held views.

Focus 2: We must move beyond this polarization and genuinely put our children first – each groups claims “we do that and the other side doesn't” - but this very claim puts adults before children. I will work to build bridges and understanding among various groups so that we can have the progress our children deserve.

Issue 3: The dramatic pace of globalization and innovation are changing the world as we speak. The world our children will inhabit – in some cases the world they already inhabit, differs dramatically from that of their parents and earlier generations. Preparing them for this more flexible, creative, challenging future is an enormous challenges.

Focus 3: By strengthening the rigor and breadth of our curriculum and our children's studies, and by emphasizing the power of creativity and love of learning, we will both provide our children with tools and confidence and the innovative ability to tackle a complex and rapidly moving world. We also must acknowledge that the economy and education create a cycle – and if it is a virtuous cycle, a strong economy funds a strong education system which creates great graduates, which strengthens companies in an even stronger economy. Of course, the reverse can also be true.

6. What would you do to retain quality educators in Utah?

I think larger class sizes create additional stress for our teachers, so I would look for opportunities to bring class size down as soon as possible. I would hope that we could encourage and help teachers to continue to learn themselves and to learn to use new tools and technologies so that they can stay energized and also leverage the value that technology can bring to the classroom and to their teaching.

I also think that we should acknowledge a new facet in contemporary society that many people will have 5-7 careers in their working lifetime. I think we should design compensation and retirement options that do not penalize teachers who choose to teach for a period of their careers, and then feel a need and desire to pursue other career options. This seems “bad” to many people, but it is simply the new reality and we should have more options to accommodate this.

7. What would you do to attract new teachers in Utah, considering the fact that the legislature this year significantly reduced the retirement benefit for future teachers?

Young teachers have grown up in a very different world than previous generations and expect 5-7 career changes. I think that we should give young teachers the option of higher current compensation, which is more competitive with other immediate term career choices, with a “required” retirement contribution similar to industry levels, and then a personal choice about additional retirement contributions.

This type of model would feel “similar” to models of their friends and colleagues and I think would be more attractive to new teachers.

8. If another voucher or tuition tax credit bill is introduced in the legislature, would you support another such effort, or would you oppose it? Why?

I believe that the voucher issue is dead in Utah – our citizens have said they have faith in public education and support it. I am running for the State Board of Education to help strengthen and build Utah's public Education system.

9. In 2010 Sen. Margaret Dayton sponsored a bill (S.B. 77) that would prevent school districts from providing Association leave (paid substitutes) for teachers who serve during the school day on district committees such as negotiations. It would also prevent the school district from paying 50% of the DEA President's salary. Would you favor the continuation of the current Association leave policy between the school district and the DEA, or would you oppose it?

I believe that this is a local issue – not a state issue. If the citizens of Davis County understand the value that the Association provides to them, as taxpayers and parents/families/citizens, then they can choose to continue the arrangement. If they do not feel it brings value to the district then they may choose otherwise. I don't believe this should be a state issue, either for the State Board of Education or for the Legislature.

10. In your opinion, is there anything the State Board of Education or State Office of Education could do better?

I think the top priority of the State School Board is to listen more closely to the community and all of education's stakeholders as well as to develop a productive and positive working relationship with the business community, which could pay significant dividends to education. Businesses employ people (who pay taxes and who have children in school) and employ newly minted graduates (as employees), and have a vested interest in a great and vibrant education system. They want to contribute, to help and support, but they often feel “uninvited” or even unwelcome. Changing this dynamic could unleash an energetic group of mentors and volunteers into our school system. I applaud recent PTA efforts in Utah to include more men in the PTA and in education.

I also believe that the State Board needs to make it a priority to look at, evaluate and then implement the best suggestions of the Utah Advisory Commission to Optimize State Government. This commission spent nearly a year identifying opportunities to save money without harming education and many of these have potential for significant savings. These savings could then be used to strengthen education overall.

11. What changes, if any, would you make to the way the State School Board is elected?

The current system is difficult for potential candidates who wait until a mere 3 months before the election to know if they are actually a candidate or not. That said, the current system strikes something of a balance between a completely appointed board (as most other government boards in the State are composed) and a “free for all” or partisan elected board.

The challenge with open elections is that “regular citizens” do not have enough money to reach the citizens of an entire State Board of Education District – which is about 5 times the size of a legislative district. Therefore, regular citizens can't afford to run. Only those candidates backed by organizations are generally able to run, and we therefore miss out on the diversity of candidates we have had under the current system. Importantly, when a candidate is backed by a single large organization or system, we end up with highly polarized candidates, which again weakens our State Board of Education and our Education system.

12. Is there anything else you would like to say that we haven't asked?

Great teaching is the heart of a great education and I value and appreciate the great teachers that have been so much a part of the lives of my children. I hope to have the chance to represent District 5 on the State Board of Education to help move education forward and help address concerns and needs of all of the stakeholders in the education community.