

PLEASE ANSWER EACH OF THE FOLLOWING 22 QUESTIONS in 175 words or less.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFO

Name: Jennifer McGavin

Town of Residence: Paonia

Age: 61

Education: Master's Degree in Microbiology and Master of Business Administration

Family: Husband, Rick McGavin and Ulli, the dog

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In 150 words or less, provide a brief description of yourself.

My experience in science, business, and community leadership helps me support and strengthen Delta County schools. I hold a Master's in Microbiology from Leibniz University in Hannover and an MBA from CU Denver. For 21 years, I've owned a retail store in Paonia, giving me firsthand experience in budgeting and management. I'm also a 4th-degree black belt in Shotokan karate and teach alongside my husband, Rick, who is both a master jeweler and karate instructor.

For the past four years, I've served on the Delta County School Board, focusing on improving academic programs, supporting teachers with competitive pay, and ensuring sound financial planning. I believe schools are the heart of our community, and I'm dedicated to preparing students for success while keeping our district resilient and fiscally strong.

In my free time, I enjoy knitting, baking, gardening, and exploring Colorado's outdoors with my family.

Please note, lengthy answers will be edited for space.

1. What motivated you to run for a seat on the school board and what personal or professional experiences do you bring that will help you serve effectively?

I have been motivated to serve my community for most of my life, beginning with lessons in service I first learned as a Camp Fire Girl. I enjoy helping people and I find fulfillment in taking on complex projects that require patience, persistence, and teamwork.

Over the past four years on the school board, I've gained valuable experience navigating different viewpoints and working within a government structure to make decisions that affect all of our communities. That role has taught me the importance of listening carefully, weighing diverse perspectives, and still moving forward in the best interests of students.

My earlier experiences also shaped how I serve. In my dorm in college, I worked and lived alongside people with disabilities, which deepened my compassion and ability to understand different perspectives. As a national karate referee, I developed sharp observation skills, the discipline to stay calm under pressure, and the confidence to stand up for my decisions when it mattered most.

2.What do you see as the most pressing need(s) for infrastructure or capital projects in Delta County?

Infrastructure needs in Delta County Schools remain high, even as resources for maintenance and modernization grow tighter. I'm grateful voters supported the recent bond that renewed parts of our high schools and Paonia K-8, and I'm proud of the results so far.

Looking ahead, the most urgent need is to make sure every school has full HVAC systems and good ventilation. This isn't just about comfort, it's about keeping classrooms healthy and safe. Clean air helps students stay focused, reduces the spread of illness, and keeps fresh air moving without the need to open outside doors. That also makes our buildings more secure. Healthy kids, better learning, and safer schools all depend on this.

While we've concentrated on high schools in recent years, I believe it's time to focus more on our elementary schools. Safe parent pick-up zones, improved bus lanes, and shade structures are simple but essential projects that enhance both safety and pride in our schools. These are the kinds of upgrades our communities can rally behind.

3.What do you see as the top three challenges facing Delta County School District today?

Funding, teacher retention, and student needs are my top priorities. Our district is still underfunded compared to the state's own adequacy study, which affects class sizes,

teacher pay, and facilities. I'll continue advocating to close this gap while making sure every local dollar is used wisely and transparently.

Strong schools depend on strong teachers. To attract and keep them, we must stay competitive in pay and benefits, while also fostering supportive environments with manageable class sizes, ongoing professional development, and a culture of respect.

At the same time, students face growing academic, social, and mental health needs. We will strengthen core instruction, expand career and technical pathways, and ensure every school has continued access to counselors and mental health resources. We will also work to engage parents more directly and increase communication between schools and families. Our goal is student success in school and life.

4 What are your priorities for improving student achievement and outcomes?

My first priority is to stabilize curriculum choices so teachers and students can build consistency over time. In English Language Arts, we've already seen how strategies like effortful thinking have improved achievement. I believe the same kind of deliberate practice can help raise math performance, especially if we look for ways to weave math into every subject just as we did with reading and writing.

I also want to continue to create a more engaging school experience that combines academic rigor with experiential learning and community involvement. Hands-on projects and real-world applications help students see the value of their education and stay motivated to excel.

And most importantly, family involvement is essential to setting goals that encourage students without overwhelming them. My focus is on steady, sustainable growth in test scores while helping both students and parents see those goals as within reach. Real success comes when schools, families, and the community work together to support every child's learning.

5. How should the district support career readiness, college preparation, and vocational/technical education?

We support multiple pathways for career readiness so students can pursue their interests and goals. For those drawn to vocational training, choices like the Technical College of the Rockies give young adults the chance to gain skills that lead directly to employment or even starting a business. High school students can begin this training

while completing their diplomas, without incurring tuition costs or debt. Our counselors also connect students with additional opportunities nationwide, helping them stay focused on career goals.

For students on a college track, we provide rigorous preparation through Advanced Placement courses, which give students a head start on credits and the experience of challenging coursework. Counselors guide juniors and seniors in finding scholarships, navigating applications, and being accepted into the schools of their choice.

The results of these efforts are clear: Delta County Schools maintain nearly a 90% graduation rate, with a high percentage of students moving directly into college or meaningful careers. Our goal is to ensure every student leaves prepared for their next step.

6. Given today's tight funding climate, how would you balance the need to provide high-quality education with the responsible use of taxpayer dollars, and what changes or efficiencies would you consider to ensure the District continues to meet students' needs?

High-quality education is the goal of every employee every day, and the best investment we can make is in our staff. That means fair pay, manageable class sizes, and reducing paperwork so teachers can focus on students. At the same time, we must maintain safe, functional schools by keeping the heat on, the roofs sound, and our technology current, because these are essential for learning in today's world.

To stretch taxpayer dollars wisely, we should aggressively pursue grants for facilities and energy efficiencies, and use technology to cut costs when it doesn't reduce learning opportunities. To sustain competitive pay for staff, a community conversation about a mill levy increase might be necessary, if state funding doesn't keep pace.

Closing schools is never my first choice. Instead, close attention to enrollment trends and thoughtful staffing can help balance resources while maintaining equity across communities. Most importantly, transparency matters. Involving the public in setting priorities builds trust, directs funds where they're most needed, and keeps the focus on what matters most, on strong classrooms and successful students.

7. How should the district prioritize spending on facilities, technology, and staff?

The District should prioritize spending in a way that ensures safe, healthy, and modern learning environments while supporting staff and technology. Updating older facilities is critical—many of our schools were built before HVAC systems were standard. Classrooms need proper air exchange to keep CO₂ levels low, which improves focus and learning, and all gyms should have air conditioning for safety and health, especially with school starting in August when temperatures can remain high.

Technology is another priority. Our IT team is essential to keeping systems running, data secure, and students and staff supported. Investments here allow teaching and learning to happen efficiently and safely.

Finally, staff remain our most important resource. We must work to keep salaries competitive with neighboring districts and provide professional development, all while being mindful of budget constraints. By balancing these three priorities, facilities, technology, and staff, the District can ensure that students learn in safe, modern spaces with strong instructional support, and set the foundation for academic success and long-term community confidence.

8. A recent report shows that a substantial number of Delta County students are not attending school in the District. What do you propose to change this statistic and bring more students back to Delta County schools?

Our declining student count reflects both demographics and educational choices. Delta County has fewer young families, partly due to limited local job opportunities. At the same time, competition from private schools and an increase in homeschooling have added to enrollment challenges. Every parent should choose what fits their family best, but public schools welcome every child, regardless of background, ability, or language, and they do so proudly. They also offer the widest range of opportunities, from advanced academics to athletics, arts, and clubs, that private or home-based programs can't match.

What's often missing isn't quality but connection. Families want schools where their children feel supported, valued, and part of a community. Strengthening that sense of belonging starts with safe, inclusive environments and open communication between schools, families, and towns. Building trust through regular collaboration and shared goals helps address concerns early and keeps families engaged. When we focus on relationships as well as academics, enrollment follows because families see public schools as partners in their children's growth.

9. Do you believe it is fiscally responsible for the district to combine the North Fork Montessori School in Crawford and the North Fork School of Integrated Studies (NFSIS) in Paonia into a single building? Why or why not?

Merging North Fork Montessori in Crawford with NFSIS in Paonia might appear to make financial sense, but the practical and educational costs suggest otherwise. Any savings would come mostly from sharing one principal, secretary, and a few bus routes, while families in Crawford would still face transportation challenges. Managing two schools with such different educational philosophies under a single leader would also be extremely difficult.

Montessori moved to Crawford when it outgrew its Hotchkiss facility, and keeping schools on separate campuses provides both educational focus and community value. The Montessori school has become a point of pride and engagement for Crawford, showing how a community and school can work together and thrive. Combining the schools could undermine that sense of identity, pride, and local support. These are intangibles that are just as important as dollars saved.

Fiscal responsibility isn't only about cutting costs; it's about ensuring resources are used in ways that maintain quality education and strong community connections. In this case, keeping the schools separate best serves students and their communities.

10. If the two schools were combined, what location factors (Crawford vs. Paonia) should weigh most heavily in that decision — financial, enrollment, community needs, or something else?

At present, I do not believe Crawford and Paonia schools should be combined. Each one brings unique strengths to its community and has strong parent and town support. The same is true for Hotchkiss K-8 and Paonia K-8, which post some of our best test scores, follow a traditional curriculum, and benefit from excellent community engagement.

Rather than weighing which community should lose its school, I believe the better question is how we can build on these successes across the district. For example, could Delta elementary schools explore a bilingual track like in Telluride, creating their own special educational opportunity and attracting students? Families rally around schools that reflect their needs and values.

Instead of consolidating programs which operate within budget and provide meaningful opportunities, we should look districtwide at how to expand choice, strengthen community ties, and make every school a place families are proud to support.

11. How do you balance financial responsibility with the importance of maintaining community identity and access to schools in smaller towns?

Schools in our smaller towns serve a greater purpose than education alone. They are gathering places that sustain local connection and pride. Closing or consolidating them risks eroding the community ties that keep families engaged with our district.

Fiscal responsibility remains essential. That means tracking enrollment carefully, investing in projects that directly benefit students, and finding efficiencies through shared services, grants, and effective use of technology. These actions help extend our resources without limiting access.

I'm committed to maintaining high educational standards while honoring the unique character and needs of each community in our district. By involving parents and residents in setting goals, for example through the North Fork Task Force, we strengthen trust and collaboration. This cooperative approach helps us find solutions where sound budgeting and strong communities complement one another, ensuring every school remains both sustainable and valued.

12. What alternatives to consolidation, if any, do you believe should be considered to address budget, enrollment, and facility challenges?

We've already shown that alternatives to consolidation can work, as in Cedaredge where the high school and middle school share a principal and some teachers while maintaining separate campuses. This kind of creative leadership structure helps stretch resources without taking away a community's school.

Another important strategy is increasing enrollment. We can do more outreach to non-public school families and remind homeschoolers about part-time enrollment, which allows students to join classes that complement their home education. Our online school also offers flexible opportunities for in-district students while keeping them connected to activities like sports, homecoming, and counseling.

On facilities, we already track maintenance needs districtwide, which helps us plan ahead rather than react to emergencies. We should continue this practice, pursue grants such as the Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) grants, and explore every outside funding source available. By planning carefully and seeking creative solutions,

we can preserve programs, maintain facilities, and keep our schools strong without turning first to consolidation.

13. How can the district recruit and retain excellent teachers and support staff?

Recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and support staff starts with valuing their work. Competitive pay and benefits are critical, especially when nearby districts may offer more. Careful planning and prioritizing of resources can help us maintain stable salaries and ensure we don't lose great educators to surrounding areas.

Beyond pay, teachers stay where they feel supported. That means reasonable class sizes, access to high-quality professional development, and mentoring for new teachers. Streamlining administrative tasks with better technology also gives staff more time to focus on students.

We also need to highlight Delta County as a great place to live and work. Strong community support, opportunities for leadership, and recognition for outstanding work make a real difference in morale and retention.

Finally, listening to staff and including them in problem-solving builds loyalty. When teachers and support staff know their voices matter, they are more likely to stay and grow with the district.

14. How would you address teacher shortages in certain subject areas?

Teacher shortages in critical areas are a challenge across Colorado, and Delta County is no exception. To address this, we need both short-term solutions and long-term strategies.

In the short term, we can grow partnerships with universities to attract student teachers and continue our pathways for local residents who want to become certified in high-need fields like math or special education. Offering tuition assistance or loan forgiveness for those willing to commit to our district could make a real difference.

We also need to make Delta County attractive to specialists who have many options. That includes competitive pay, but also flexible scheduling, mentorship, and strong professional support so they don't feel isolated in their roles. Just as important, they should have opportunities to keep advancing their own skills.

The goal is not just filling vacancies, but creating stability so students benefit from consistent, high-quality instruction.

15. How do you see the district's role in supporting students with diverse learning needs, including special education and gifted programs?

Our district's role is to make sure every child has the chance to succeed, whether they need extra support, advanced challenges, or both. That means standing behind students with disabilities and gifted learners with the same commitment to equity and opportunity.

Special education is one of the clearest examples of both a responsibility and a challenge. Federal law was designed to cover up to 40% of the additional costs of special education, yet in reality only 15–20% is funded. Colorado adds some support, but districts still receive only about 23% of actual costs, leaving more than three-quarters of the expense to be absorbed locally. This makes special education an underfunded mandate, but one we meet every day, because it's about children, not percentages.

At the same time, gifted learners deserve advanced classes, special projects, and opportunities where they can thrive. With careful budgeting, grant writing, and advocating for fairer funding, we can give all students, from those who need the most support to those ready to accelerate, the tools to reach their full potential.

16. What is your position on student safety, both physical and online?

Student safety, whether physical or online, must always be our priority.

Student safety includes both physical and emotional well-being, on campus and online. On the physical side, our schools use tools like LifeSpot, an Active Shooter Safety Response system, to keep campuses secure and improve communication in emergencies. Just as important, we must strengthen prevention through training. Adults, including teachers, staff, and parents, need consistent instruction in intervention and de-escalation strategies, and we must model non-bullying behavior ourselves. Children learn from what they see, and training students alone is only partly effective if adults are not setting the same example.

Online safety is also critical. Cyberbullying can cause real harm, and while schools cannot oversee every online interaction, they must respond when digital behavior affects the school environment. Encouraging polite, respectful communication, both in person and online, helps build a culture of empathy and accountability. Family structure and community values play an essential role in this work. True safety comes from prevention, compassion, and a shared commitment to respect.

17. How should the school board improve communication and transparency with parents, students, and the wider community?

Parents already receive a steady stream of information from schools and the district, but true communication must be a two-way street. Families need ways to share concerns without feeling like they are overreacting, and staff need to be able to listen without becoming defensive. Parents also have a role, to be forthright but courteous, so that conversations remain constructive.

Teachers are already overburdened, so the district should explore systems that do not place the entire communication load on them. Feedback tools, parent forums, and structured opportunities to ask questions directly to principals or board members can help families feel heard.

For the wider community, transparency means more than posting documents online. It requires translating educational jargon into plain language and presenting information in formats people actually use: social media updates, livestreams, Q&A sessions, and accessible in-person meetings. While attendance may be low until a hot-button issue arises, consistency builds trust. Ultimately, communication improves when the board actively listens, responds clearly, and makes information easy for everyone to understand.

18. How would you encourage parent and community involvement in schools?

Our schools do better when parents and the community feel welcome and know their help matters. Not everyone can drop in at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday, so we need to make it clear that the school has volunteer slots for evenings or weekends, or even ways to pitch in from home. Sometimes it's as simple as reading to a class, babysitting for an event, or lending support with a club activity. These little things add up.

Clear, down-to-earth communication goes a long way. Parents want to know what's needed and how their efforts make a difference. So we should keep it simple, use plain language, translate as much as possible into Spanish, and reach out in the ways people already check: texts, email, and Facebook.

And community involvement doesn't always mean fundraising. Inviting local businesses or civic groups to share their time and talents, such as mentoring, guest speaking, or offering hands-on projects, will build a connection between students and the real-world.

Most of all, people want to feel heard. When we listen, say thank you, and celebrate contributions, it builds a school culture where everyone feels proud to be part of the team.

19. How should the board handle disagreements or controversies within the community?

Disagreements are part of public service, and the school board's role is to handle them with respect, fairness, and transparency. When tensions run high, the first step is to listen to people's concerns, even when we don't agree with them. Being heard can ease frustration on all sides.

Next, it's important to provide clear, accurate information. School issues can get clouded by rumor and jargon, so the board has a responsibility to explain decisions in plain language and back them up with facts. That helps build trust, even if not everyone is happy with the outcome.

The board should also focus on finding common ground. We may not all share the same viewpoint, but we share the same goals: safe schools, strong academics, and opportunities for kids. By emphasizing those shared values, we can keep disagreements from becoming divisions.

Finally, controversy should never derail the work of educating students. Respectful dialogue, transparency, and steady leadership help ensure that decisions serve children first and foremost.

20. Where would you like to see the district five years from now?

Five years from now, I hope Colorado has fully funded K–12 education. Adequate and reliable funding would allow us to reduce financial anxiety, invest in our staff and schools, and give children the kind of learning environment they deserve.

Locally, I want to see steady gains in student achievement that show our current goals and strategies are working. Rising test scores, stronger growth in both math and reading, and new opportunities for hands-on learning would demonstrate that we are preparing students well for whatever path they choose.

School climate is just as important. I'd like to see a continued decline in bullying, schools that feel welcoming and supportive to every student, and staff who set strong examples of respect. Even on the playing fields, I'd hope our coaches are modeling positive leadership.

In short, I want Delta County Schools to be known not only for academic progress, but also as places where every child feels safe, respected, and supported.

21. How can the district prepare students for opportunities unique to Delta County, such as agriculture, trades, and emerging industries?

Delta County has unique strengths, and our schools give students every chance to explore and prepare for them. Agriculture is central to our community, and programs like FFA and our ag barns in every high school give students hands-on skills that connect directly to local careers.

At the same time, we know many students are interested in trades and emerging industries. The Technical College of the Rockies (TCR) is an outstanding partner, offering pathways in cybersecurity, CAD design, and traditional trades like welding and carpentry. High school students can begin this training while still earning their diplomas, saving both time and money as they prepare for their futures.

Most importantly, we encourage students to follow their calling. Whether it's agriculture, the trades, college, or a new technology field, our job as a district is to provide the tools, experiences, and partnerships that help them discover their strengths and step confidently into the next stage of their lives.

22. What do you see as the biggest opportunities for innovation in education in our district?

For Delta County, the biggest opportunities for innovation come from preparing students for the future of our region. We live in a place with untapped potential in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and modern health care. These fields can build local resilience by helping us adapt, grow, and recover from outside pressures, and our schools can play a major role in that.

Imagine our district becoming known for teaching the skills that help our communities thrive in changing times. The Technical College of the Rockies (TCR) can be a valuable partner in this work, especially through its medical and health care programs that build local expertise and attract new opportunities to our area.

Innovation also means bringing communities together. When schools partner with businesses, civic groups, and families, we create stronger, more connected towns. Public education can be the driver of opportunity, growth, and stability for generations to come.