

March 26, 2021

2021 Yinghua Academy School Board Candidate Statements

The following EIGHT individuals will stand for election to the Yinghua Academy School Board in April 2021 for terms running July 2021 through June 2024. Their names and affiliations are below, and their candidate statements appear on the following pages.

There are five open seats on the School Board to be filled by this election. On April 29, official ballots will be sent to all eligible voters via the email on file in Infinite Campus (or via U.S. mail if you have stated this communication preference). Ballots will be accepted by email from a Yinghua-recognized email address or by U.S. mail to Yinghua Academy. All ballots received by Yinghua Academy by 6 p.m. on Thursday, May 6 will be considered on time.

Voters will have the opportunity to hear from the candidates at the virtual (online) Annual Meeting of the School Board on Thursday, April 29, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. on Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/6439412307>.

The School Board relies on a diverse base of knowledge to provide good governance. The primary qualification is that the individual is a willing, committed, and objective leader. School Board responsibilities include supporting and evaluating the executive director, setting policy to ensure the school's ongoing viability, and overseeing the financial management of the school.

According to the Yinghua Academy bylaws, in compliance with state statutes, the Yinghua School Board follows the 1/1/1 governance model: At least one member of the School Board must be a licensed teacher working at the school, one member must be a parent/guardian of a currently enrolled student, and one member must be an outside community member who is neither employed by the school nor a parent/guardian of a child currently attending Yinghua Academy.

Candidates along with their occupations are listed alphabetically by category below. Parent candidates' listings include their children's current grades in parentheses.

2021 Candidates and Affiliations

- Licensed Teacher (510045) **Ye Cheng**, 3B Teacher, Yinghua Academy
- Parent/Guardian **Ryan Else**, 3rd and 6th; Attorney, Law Office of Brockton D. Hunter, PA, Veterans Defense Project
- Parent/Guardian **Andrew Lawton**, kindergarten; Teacher, Head of Enrichment, School Board Vice-Chair, Venture Academy
- Community Member **Cindy Moeller**, incumbent; Retired, Charter School Founder, Volunteer, and Board Member
- Parent/Guardian **Suzanne Reider**, incumbent, 3rd; Supply Chain, Digi International
- Parent/Guardian **Amanda Schneider**, incumbent, 5th and 8th; Chief of Staff – CFO Office, Ameriprise Financial
- Community Member **Yinglu Zeglin**, Chinese Immersion Program Coordinator, Concordia Language Villages
- Community Member **Hongjuan (Jenny) Zhou**, Chinese Instructor, Breck School

2021 Candidate Statements

(1) Licensed Teacher **YE CHENG**

My name is Ye Cheng. I was born and raised in Guangzhou, China, and in 2013 I graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Master of Arts degree in Counseling Psychology–School Counseling, K-12. Upon graduation, I was fortunate to be offered an opportunity to teach in a national leading Chinese immersion school–Yinghua Academy. I taught 2nd grade for the first four years. Currently, I am the 3B homeroom teacher and third grade team lead. Since 2016, I have been involved in several leadership roles at Yinghua, including leading the 2nd and 3rd grade teams, mentoring new teachers, and serving on the Academic Support Team. In 2018, I completed a Master of Education degree in Dual and Immersion Language Education, K-6, again from UMN. I am licensed to teach kindergarten through grade 6 in Minnesota.

I grew up as an ethnic minority, Dai, in a multicultural metropolitan city in southern China, where Cantonese is a predominant language. Throughout the years of living and studying in China, my parents, now retired from their journalist and news editor roles, brought me on their travels all around the country to appreciate the magnificent Chinese culture presented in different forms in various areas. After moving to the United States, I carried on their legacy and continued this journey myself. I have traveled through many countries in North and South America including Cuba and Peru. I taught Chinese language and culture formally and informally to young children I met along the way. This is how I learned to be open-minded, kind and caring, and to appreciate and understand different cultural perspectives. It is my hope to bring these values to all the children I've taught and am teaching at Yinghua, and I encourage them to be true global citizens.

As a licensed Chinese immersion teacher at Yinghua, I am running for the School Board in order to be directly involved in strategic planning and in many important decisions that impact the interest of all students and the school community. Particularly, I am interested in working with the board to develop a community of students who are kind and caring, whose learning potential is maximized, and who have an international perspective and a sense of responsibility to the school and local communities.

As a native Chinese speaker with 8 years of experience at Yinghua, I am fully committed to the school's mission and its values. I have a solid understanding of our school's strengths as well as the challenges it faces from an immersion teacher's viewpoint, especially as we are entering the turning point of this pandemic and the post-pandemic era. The year of 2021 calls for healing and unity. I believe that the values taught to me by my parents and my experience working with the students, parents, teachers, and the administration will provide a unique perspective to the continual development and success of Yinghua Academy.

(2) Parent/Guardian **RYAN ELSE**

My name is Ryan Else, and I appreciate your consideration for serving on the Yinghua Academy School Board. I am the father of Skylar Else (grade 3) and Lola Busby (grade 6). As a product of the Minneapolis public schools of the 1980s and 1990s, I greatly appreciate the education our daughters are receiving at Yinghua. Of course, the Chinese language skills and formal education are impressive, but the most impressive aspect of Yinghua to me is the culture of intelligent kindness it instills in our children. One day our family was sharing childhood stories of my wife and myself. We stopped with a realization and asked, "have you ever seen a fight at your school? I mean a real fight where one kid tries to hurt another...". The way the girls looked at me as if I asked if they took a field trip to the moon says everything that needs saying about Yinghua's values. Acts of cruelty that were common in my childhood are so taboo at Yinghua that it is unimaginable and disgusting to them. This culture extends to the excellent formal education that we have come to expect as well. I am interested in serving on the Board as a way of fostering and improving this culture of excellence.

My professional experience as a lawyer, nonprofit manager, legislative and policy advocate, and Army veteran will bring valuable attributes to the position. I have worked for about a decade as a criminal defense lawyer, advocating for the rights and interests of some of the most disenfranchised people in society. I am the founder and former executive director of a nonprofit called the Veterans Defense Project that advocates for court policies such as veterans treatment courts and related legislation. In that capacity, I learned how to build a new organization to effectuate its mission. As Legislative Chair on the Board of the Minnesota Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, I have advocated for laws that promote common sense and ethical criminal justice policies. Having to be the voice of the most feared people has given me the experience to effectively advocate for the best interests of our children. The real-world experience of working to make ideas into laws and policies will allow me to help our board realize our creative solutions.

Yinghua, like all schools, will face incredible challenges as we transition back to normalcy out of the pandemic. This crisis presents an opportunity to improve the culture of the school even further. We will also have to ensure those kids who had the most difficult circumstances during the pandemic are not left behind academically or socially. My ability to advocate for the adults that were largely left behind by society will help ensure there is a voice for these children in our board meetings.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my candidacy.

(3) Parent/Guardian **ANDREW LAWTON**

After spending five years in Seattle, WA, working as a graphic designer I returned to the Midwest. I graduated summa cum laude from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and I began my teaching career at a project-based learning charter school. My 20 years as an art educator have been almost entirely at charter schools. Recently I obtained a Master of Science in Educational Leadership with a focus on Arts in Education and Project-Based Learning. It is my passion for student-centered learning and entrepreneurial thinking that motivates me to participate in the Yinghua Academy School Board.

The direction of my career started towards the end of college. It was evident that I wanted to be involved in more than just a traditional school setting. I became extremely interested in the idea of a teacher cooperative. This was influenced by my exposure with the project-based curriculum of Minnesota New County School while I was student teaching. After this I became an advisor in a project-based learning school for my initial two years of teaching while also participating on the School Board. The classroom was recognized as a dynamic place. Students were not all from the same grade level nor were they doing the same work. Each student worked on their own project, developed along with an “advisor,” which is what we called a teacher. It was not perfect, but it connected with my Walden sensibilities at the time.

As my career progressed, I enjoyed many other teaching experiences. I taught art and music at an inner-city charter in Akron, Ohio. These few years were perhaps the toughest of my career, but this was also a time I developed the most in my early years. I came back to the Midwest taking a position at Hmong College Prep Academy. Over the next ten years I build an art department that I am immensely proud of. Feeling again a need to explore, I had a short tenure with Minneapolis Public Schools. I discovered that I missed the community of a smaller school, and this led me back to charters and Venture Academy. Again, I have built a department that I am proud of. I have taken on a role of leadership as the Head of Enrichment. I have also been a board member for two years acting currently as the Vice-Chair.

One of the great goals of education as well as one of the challenges of the modern classroom is teaching children how to acquire information through research. The information-driven society of the future will demand flexible, adaptive skills and abilities. We must prepare students to participate in a workforce in which they reason dynamically and critically, make informed decisions, solve unknown problems, and work collaboratively to address unanticipated priorities. I believe Yinghua Academy seeks to prepare students for the 21st century workplace. I would like to bring my experience as a charter school teacher and leader to the Yinghua Academy board.

(4) Community Member **CINDY MOELLER**, incumbent

Why am I interested in serving on the Yinghua Academy School Board? Given my deep involvement in the founding of Yinghua Academy, I have a great interest in the continuing success of the school and its students. In June 2019 I was asked to fill a vacant seat on the Yinghua Board as a community member, and I was happy to do so. Since then, I have served on the Personnel Committee and have chaired that committee since the fall of 2019. I am inspired by how Yinghua has grown and thrived and evolved over the years, and I look forward to contributing to the school's continued success.

What attributes would I bring to this position? Though I am retired now, I have had considerable experience during my career in both education and business. In my 20s I earned an MSW and then served as a school social worker for four years, working primarily with students who qualified for special education services and their families. I then earned an MBA and worked for 20 years in various human resource leadership roles in both large and small companies.

In 2003 I returned to public education and was a Fellow in the New Leaders for New Schools program, a year-long principal training and development program in Chicago. Through my New Leaders experience, I learned a lot about what practices contribute to a great school with inspired students, parents, and teachers as well as strong academic achievement.

In 2005 I returned to Minnesota to be the director of a new charter school that was not able to attract enough students to open. However, I was able to take the work of the founding board of that school, and, with their support as well as the involvement and hard work of many other people, "morph" that school into Yinghua Academy. We opened Yinghua Academy in the fall of 2006. I served as the Board Chair until the fall of 2010.

From 2005 to 2008 I worked at the Center for School Change (then at the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota) and provided support and information to a number of charter schools and charter school boards.

In summary, I would say the attributes I bring to the Yinghua Board include leadership experience, charter school experience, knowledge of the practices of high-performing schools, strategic planning experience, knowledge of human resource practices, and a focus on teamwork and collaboration.

What issues facing Yinghua Academy interest me the most? I am especially interested in strategic planning and in fundraising, since I think both are essential to the continued success and development of Yinghua Academy.

(5) Parent/Guardian **SUZANNE REIDER**, incumbent

I am Suzanne Reider, parent of a 3rd grader at Yinghua. I was born in Taichung, Taiwan, where I spent the first few years of my life before my parents brought me to the US before starting preschool. I remember all the work my parents had to go through to ensure I learned some Chinese. Every Saturday, they would drive us to Chinese School. Whenever we spoke to them in English, they would tell us they didn't understand English, and we needed to speak to them in Chinese. Somehow, they managed to get enough Chinese in us to be able to communicate, but I was not confident that I would be able to pass my Chinese language or culture on to my kids. That is why I have been so grateful for a school like Yinghua that can help create an environment in Minnesota to teach our kids in Chinese.

I actually got involved with Yinghua before my kids were school age and joined the board for the first time back when the building expansion was just about to happen. I have also worked at Yinghua for a bit and was able to get to know the staff, students, and school from a very different perspective. Now I am back as a parent board member and serve as Board Treasurer as I have been on the Finance Committee for quite a few years now!

Here is what I have learned from being a part of the Yinghua Board and Committees these past few years. I know there are gaps at Yinghua, but we have a community of people who care and are so passionate about our students. This community consists of parents, grandparents, alums, teachers, admins, and students. I feel blessed to be a part of this community.

I hope that I can continue to serve this community and have a chance to work with you all to continue to improve what Chinese immersion education can look like for all of our kids.

(6) Parent/Guardian **AMANDA SCHNEIDER**, incumbent

My name is Amanda Schneider, and I am the proud parent of Geneva (8B) and Isabella (5C). This is my sixth year on the Yinghua Academy School Board, and I am hoping that you will re-elect me to serve a third term. For four years, I served as Board Treasurer, and, for the past 15+ months, I have served as Board Chair.

I never could have predicted that my service as Chair would coincide with a global pandemic! This experience has been a humbling one, and it has tested even those of us with the most seasoned leadership skills.

During this challenging period, I have partnered with school administrators to develop our school's response to Covid-19, and I've worked with the full board to approve the implementation of three distinct learning modes. I admire the dedication of our teachers, the perseverance of our students, and the tenacity of school leaders during this most unusual year, but I am not at all surprised that everyone has risen to the occasion because we are a school community that works hard and pulls together during good times and tough times

Looking ahead, I hope to leverage my learnings of the last year and my previous board work to help shape the future of Yinghua. More specifically, I would like to focus on the following:

- Long range strategic and succession planning: I commit to working to identify and groom the next Board Chair, to ensure a smooth transition, and to work together with our community on Yinghua's long range strategic plan with a review of areas such as finance, facilities, and key-person succession.
- Equity and inclusion: Let's continue to work to better understand our school community, to meet each family's unique needs, and to help each student reach full potential.
- Conservative budgeting and capital preservation: I commit to thoughtful financial stewardship of Yinghua resources through conservative budget assumptions and monthly monitoring of approved budgets to rebuild post-pandemic fund balances to allow Yinghua to navigate any future financial strains.
- Technology: Potentially utilize Zoom to eliminate snow days and ensure learning can happen regardless of weather. Consider the continuation of Zoom as an option to help students who are absent due to illness.
- Space utilization: Find ways to maximize space usage indoors and outdoors to allow for the greatest number of students to learn at Yinghua in a safe and healthy manner. For instance, I'd like to help the school finish the work on the old boiler room so that students can use it as a makerspace--a place for hands-on innovation; and I'd like to help the school develop outdoor areas for teaching, small group meetings, and lunch on fair-weather days.

I hope you'll elect me to serve another three years on the Yinghua Academy School Board to focus on these goals and continue to shepherd the work I've helped to shape. When my younger child graduates from Yinghua in 2024, I promise to leave Yinghua in an even better position than when our family joined the Yinghua community eight years ago.

(7) Community Member **YINGLU ZEGLIN**

I would like to apply for the position of Yinghua Academy board member. I am an active community member with a background in Chinese immersion curriculum and program development. I always remember and appreciate the first working opportunity I had as an afterschool program teacher at Yinghua Academy, I would love the chance to give back by sharing my input. With the experiences I have in the Chinese immersion field, I want to work with the other board members to make Yinghua Academy a school that can help all of the students succeed.

I have administrative experience and Chinese immersion teaching knowledge that I would like to put to use by serving on the board at Yinghua Academy.

- Curriculum Alignment: As the Minnetonka Middle Schools Program Coordinator and Concordia Language Village Chinese dean, I have had years of experience in aligning the curriculum vertically and horizontally. I can help with the pedagogy sub-committee to enhance the performance of the staff. I believe that a better curriculum alignment between classes and grades can help students narrow the achievement gap. I also have been teaching for over ten years. Thus, I can provide first-hand information about teaching in Chinese immersion programs.
- Building a Community: As the dean of Sen Lin Hu, in Concordia Language Villages, I work with Chinese native speakers, Chinese as a second language learners, and some staff who only speak English. I deeply understand the importance of all the members working together to serve the students in our community. All of the staff needs to work together effectively as a community first, in order to achieve the goal for every student's success. I can contribute my administrative experience and leadership skills to help Yinghua Academy build a strong community.

As an educator, I am most interested in helping students to narrow their achievement gap and learn at their best in an equitable environment. Students always come first. Therefore, student success is my top priority.

I am confident you'll find me a good fit for your needs at Yinghua Academy. I look forward to contributing my skills to the School Board for the Yinghua community. Thank you so much for your consideration.

(8) Community Member **HONGJUAN (JENNY) ZHOU**

My name is Hongjuan Zhou, and I also go by Jenny. Currently, I teach Chinese to elementary students at Breck School in Golden Valley, Minnesota. I heard the news of the open School Board member position from Dr. Kaishan Kong and Dr. Paul Haller. Yinghua has a great reputation nationwide, and I have admired Yinghua for a long time. I am an educator, and I'm passionate about teaching Chinese language and culture. I believe my knowledge and experience will contribute greatly to Yinghua. Therefore, I am writing to express my interest in serving on the Yinghua Academy School Board.

I am a native of China, and I have been living in the United States since 2007. I hold a bachelor's degree in management from the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China and a master's degree in teaching from Hamline University. My learning experience in China and the United States provides me the advantage of knowing the field of education of both countries. It helps me think, compare, and implement the best practices in my teaching career. My living experience in China and the US has helped me become a bilingual and bicultural person and form a broader view to see and appreciate the diversity of the world. I have benefited from my experiences, and I believe bilingual and bicultural education will benefit our children's and the world's future.

I have over fifteen years of teaching experience in different kinds of settings. I have taught college students, weekend Chinese school students, immersion students, and world language classroom students. Among these experiences, I really appreciate my four years of teaching at Jie Ming Mandarin Immersion Academy in St. Paul. It helped me learn a lot about immersion education pedagogy, as well as accumulate the practical experience of teaching immersion education. I also love my current teaching job at Breck School. It has given me the opportunity to see that an excellent learning environment (campus, teachers, students, families, resources, community, etc.) really can form and impact people's life greatly, not only including the growth of every student, but also the growth of the teachers. Especially this school year, under the complicated circumstances brought on by the pandemic, I am really impressed with Breck's ability to thrive and maintain a strong sense of community. I believe my working experience in different types of schools can contribute to Yinghua.

Last, I believe in lifelong learning. I am curious to learn about new things, especially in the field of education. I have seen faculty and staff from Yinghua present at conferences, workshops, and local events. Yinghua has had a record of great academic success. Plus, there are people with different talents and expertise, from different professions, who have come together to the School Board to make the school better and better. I believe if I were fortunate enough to join the School Board, in addition to serving Yinghua, I can learn from the other board members as well as the school. It will definitely enrich my life and career experience and help me to be a better teacher and human being.

In conclusion, I am interested in serving on the Yinghua School Board, and I hope to use my knowledge and experience to advocate for teachers and students at the school, as well as contribute to Yinghua's future. Thank you for your consideration!