

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
President-Elect Candidate 2026



Jennifer Kelsall, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Ridgewood High School District 234
Norridge, Illinois

Member:

- AASA, 2014-present
- AASA Executive Board, 2024-present
- AASA Governing Board, 2018-2024
- Illinois Association of School Administrators, 2014-present
- League of Innovative Schools, 2019-present

Current Position: Superintendent
Ridgewood High School District 234
Norridge, IL
2014-present

Previous Position: Principal
Ridgewood High School District 234
Norridge, IL
2008-2014

Post Secondary Education:

- Ph.D., Illinois State University, Normal, IL, 2015
- M.A., Governors State University, University Park, IL, 1998
- B.S., Illinois State University, Normal, IL, 1994

AASA and Other Activities:

- AASA Conference Presenter, 2025: *Empowering Education through Community Partnerships: Building Bridges for Student Success*
- AASA Aspiring Superintendent Cohort Mentor

- AASA National Certification Program, 2020
- AASA Personalized Learning Cohort, 2016
- Illinois School for Advanced Leadership Fellow
- Illinois Association of School Administrators, Government Relations Advocacy Committee
- O'Hare Noise Compatibility Commission, Vice Chair
- Suburban School Superintendents Advisory Board Member
- Paradigm Cyber National Advisory Board Member
- State Peer Reviewer of Doctoral Programs

Why are you seeking election as AASA's president-elect?

Throughout my career, I've worked to unite people around a shared purpose of leading and learning together. I'm seeking election as president-elect because I believe deeply in our collective power to lift one another up and to ensure every child, regardless of background or experience, receives meaningful learning opportunities. By collaborating with courage and clarity, we can continue to strengthen public education and enrich our schools, our communities, and most importantly, our kids.

If nominated and elected, what will be your No. 1 priority?

My number one priority would be elevating our collective voice, speaking boldly and united for the needs of our students, educators, and communities. When we advocate together, we can amplify our impact, strengthen public education, and ensure every child benefits from the power of our shared commitment and expertise.

Education Today: Why Schools Must Evolve and How Communities Can Move with Them

Education today looks vastly different from the classrooms many adults remember. A generation ago, students sat in rows, absorbed information delivered by the teacher, and demonstrated understanding through tests and homework. Resources were limited and students were expected to work hard, follow directions, and master content largely through repetition.

Today's students expect something more. They want to be challenged, engaged, and recognized as individuals with unique strengths and needs. They also have access to an unprecedented array of tools: real-time information, adaptive learning platforms, collaborative digital workspaces, and instant communication. Technology gives them opportunities previous generations never imagined. It also means schools cannot simply operate as they did decades ago. The demands, possibilities, and expectations are different, and our educational systems must adapt accordingly.

Learners today benefit from experiences that help them apply skills, not just recall facts. They thrive when feedback is specific, actionable, and tied to what they can do. When our district began moving toward a competency-based system, these ideas were central. We wanted learning to be challenging and meaningful, so we started conversations about what grades really communicate.

One of the most powerful moments came from a simple demonstration. We randomly selected two volunteers and asked them to dribble a basketball and perform a few basic skills. Afterward, we asked the audience to assign each participant a letter grade: A, B, or C. The discussion that followed was lively and revealing. Some people graded based on technique, others on improvement, and others on confidence or effort. There was no shared definition of what an "A," "B," or "C" meant. That ambiguity helped people see why letter grades can be misleading and why competency-based descriptions of what students know and can do are far more constructive.

That exercise provided an important starting point, but it wasn't enough. Ten years later, we still hear the same refrain from many parents: *"School should be the way it was for me."* Even when we draw parallels to fields where advancement is expected (medicine, engineering, or even something as familiar as surgical techniques) and some community members struggle to accept that schools, too, must change.

Change in education succeeds only when the community understands it, trusts it, and participates in it. To bring families and stakeholders along, districts must invest in ongoing, authentic engagement. Here are some strategies that can help:

1. Create transparent learning experiences for families.

Invite parents to experience the classroom as students do through simulations, walkthroughs, and hands-on demonstrations that highlight current instructional practices. Experiencing the difference builds understanding more effectively than explaining it.

2. Use storytelling to show impact.

Share real examples of how updated practices improve student learning. When families see the quality of student thinking, they better understand the change.

3. Build advisory groups that include all stakeholders.

These groups should help shape information. Co-creation increases ownership and reduces resistance.

4. Communicate regularly and in multiple formats.

Short videos, newsletters, classroom updates, and infographics can make the purpose behind change easier to grasp. Avoid jargon and focus on student outcomes.

5. Elevate student voice.

When students explain their learning, it reframes the discussion. Families appreciate hearing from students.

6. Provide time for dialogue.

Host events where stakeholders can ask questions, express concerns, and explore solutions collaboratively. People support what they help shape.

If education is to meet the needs of today's students, schools must evolve. Lasting change requires trust, transparency, and partnership. When communities are engaged as contributors, districts can move forward more confidently, together, toward a system that reflects the world students are entering, not the one adults remember.

**AASA President-elect
Candidate Filing Packet**

AASA Election: President-elect Candidate Pledge

I have read the rules and procedures contained within the *AASA Election Guidelines* and I agree to obey the AASA election rules, in spirit and in word.



Signature

12-5-25
Date

Address Ridgewood High School District 234

 7500 West Montrose Avenue

 Norridge, IL 6076

Office Telephone: (708)697-5533

FAX Number: (708)456-8238

Email Address: jkelsall@ridgenet.org

The *AASA Election Guidelines* are posted on the AASA website at www.aasa.org

AASA
1925 Ballenger Avenue
Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314

December 5, 2025

Dear Ms. Kat Sturdevant:

It is with great enthusiasm that I am writing to indicate my intention to seek the office of president-elect of AASA. Over the past 32 years, I have dedicated my career to elevating student voice, expanding meaningful learning opportunities and providing guidance and support to emerging leaders. These experiences have shaped my leadership and I am confident that my background would be a continued asset to our professional organization.

My service on the Governing Board, and now the executive Committee, has deepened my understanding of the exceptional work AASA leads on behalf of students, educators, and communities across the nation. This work inspires me, and it would be an honor to contribute in an even greater capacity to advance our shared mission.

Please accept this letter as my formal declaration of intent. I look forward to the opportunities ahead and to continuing to serve our organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Kelsall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jennifer Kelsall, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Ridgewood High School District 234

December 4, 2025

Dear Dr. Clark:

I am seeking nomination to become a candidate for the position of president-elect of AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

Compliance with the AASA electoral process requires that I ask IASA not to endorse or promote my candidacy or urge my election.

This does not preclude your organization from noting that AASA has an election and noting all of the candidates, including me. AASA's electoral process was reformed because, like the national political electoral process, it had become too expensive and prolonged. The Executive Committee of AASA adopted the new rules regarding endorsements of candidates to make the campaigns more consistent with standards of conduct and ethics of school administrators, by having all campaigning done through AASA publications and at the AASA National Conference on Education.

Individual active members may communicate with other AASA active members, about a single candidate and support of that candidate by letter, fax or electronic transmission. Any cost of the mailings, faxes, or electronic transmissions must be the responsibility of the individual and cannot be that of the candidate or other third party. No enclosure, attachment or brochure may be distributed with the letter, fax or electronic transmission.

A member may discuss a candidate on a personal, one-to-one individual basis with another member. Endorsement of candidates by a state association, caucus, committee, group or corporation could result in sanctions against me, including a 10 percent deduction from my vote total.

Please call me if you have any questions about AASA election rules or the information you plan to publish. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Kelsall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Kelsall, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Ridgewood High School District 234