

PENN

PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL NETWORK of NUTLEY



To: All Candidates for Board of Education

From: Parents' Educational Network of Nutley (PENN)

Re: Request for Information

As you may know, PENN is an organization of parents which has formed to provide a means by which the interests and concerns of parents and citizens in the Township can be communicated to the school district and the Board of Education. Many parents and citizens are concerned about the direction of the school system and would like more information about the entire process. The objective of PENN is to maximize parental and family awareness and participation regarding matters involving the school district. Nutley PENN provides a forum by which its members can easily obtain information regarding the school board and candidates. The PENN membership can then vote for those candidates who are best prepared to address their concerns. We have created a website to provide our membership with news information regarding the school district: www.nutleypenn.org.

In furtherance of our objective, we will be including information about the candidates seeking election on our website to help educate PENN members and encourage involvement by members of PENN and the community in the election process. We would like to include information regarding your candidacy on our website.

Our membership has identified a number of key issues and concerns and would like to hear from the candidates on those issues. We would like to post your responses to the questions below on our website. Kindly forward your responses at your earliest convenience.

- 1) Potential Conflicts: Are you or any member of your household members of the local teacher's union or any teacher's union in the State of New Jersey? If so, please advise how this may impact your position as a board member. Also, please state whether you have a familial relationship with anyone working for the Nutley school district.

No member of my household is a member of the local teacher's union or any teacher's union in the State of New Jersey. I have no familial relationship with anyone working for the Nutley School District.

- 2) Adherence to Code of Ethics: The New Jersey School Ethics Act (N.J.S.A. 18A:12-23) requires board of education members to adhere to a Code of Ethics. Please see “NJ School Ethics” link on this website. Please confirm that you have reviewed the Code of Ethics and indicate whether you are confident that you can fulfill the stated ethical requirements. Also, please explain why you think this act is important.

I have reviewed the Code of Ethics and can fulfill the stated ethical requirements. The Code is important because it sets the standards and framework for Board activity. The Code also reinforces that the Board should not micromanage the administration and school district but should set the overall policy and direction for the district. Finally all decisions must be based on the educational welfare of the children and not on personal gain or political expediency. During my campaign I have not solicited, or accepted, funds or financial donations to my campaign. I have used my own funds for all expenditures during my campaign and therefore I have total independence with no obligations, real or perceived, to any organization - political or otherwise.

- 3) Planning for the School District’s Future: What do you foresee as the biggest challenges facing the school district in the next year? During the next five years

The major issue facing the school district right now is finding a superintendent. Without a qualified and effective superintendent, the Board will have a tough time getting its policies implemented. Other challenges going forward into the next few years are improving and maintaining the technological capability of the facilities and providing a curriculum that is up to date and that challenges students and gives them the tools they need to succeed in college and beyond. Finally, budgeting issues will continue to play a large part in the Board’s work. The Board needs to insure that budget decisions do not cut programs while at the same time seeking to keep property taxes in check.

- 4) Role of Board Members: Please provide some ideas as to how members of the Board of Education should interact with members of the administration, teachers and teachers union in order to maximize the effectiveness of the educational system in Nutley?

When implementing or changing policy, the Board should solicit input from all stakeholders, from administration, teachers, parents and the community alike. The Board should welcome input from all these groups as a way to find creative solutions to some of our most pressing issues. This interaction should be cordial, not confrontational. After hearing from all interested parties, the Board does ultimately need to integrate all the offered information and make a final decision on

the direction and policy of the district. The Board should seek to have more community involvement rather than less, and find ways through technology to keep the community better informed of issues facing the District.

- 5) Role of BOE: Describe what you feel are the attributes of a successful board of education and how you can, as a potential board member, contribute to the Board of Education's future success.

A Board member must always remember the mission of the District - providing the best educational opportunity for all children of the District. Every decision or policy made by the Board must keep that mission in mind. A major attribute of a Board member is to listen with an open mind. The District has various stakeholders and the Board must listen to all stakeholders and process the information. Board members must not view a differing opinion as a personal affront. At all costs, politics must never enter into any Board decisions.

A successful Board should be comprised of members with differing backgrounds, careers and interests. The varied experiences of each member will result in solutions being explored from many different angles.

I personally believe that having members who have children currently in the system is a major asset to the Board since these members will most certainly help to keep the main mission of the Board focus - the children - in the forefront.

I feel that I will bring an important and valuable set of skills and experience to the Board. I currently serve on the Board of Trustees for Alvernia University, Reading, PA. I sit on the finance, audit and mission effectiveness committees. Many of the issues affecting public education are also affecting higher education. While serving as a Trustee, I have been involved with reviewing and voting on budgets. The past year, the trustees had to review budgets based on the loss of both state and federal student aid, approval of faculty salary increases and reviewing reports on program accreditation. All of the decisions at the University are made with the Mission of the college as the focus.

As General Counsel for a Bank, I have the following skills: critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal relations. I work with the Bank Board of Directors and interact with outside accountants, attorneys and federal regulators. I attend committee meetings and play an integral role in providing advice to other bank officers. As an attorney for the Bank, I also provide advice to make sure the Bank is complying with both federal and state law.

- 6) Educational Standards/Curriculum/Test Scores: Please state your position on the current educational standards in Nutley. In responding to this question, please advise whether the existing curriculum sufficiently addresses any shortcomings noted by recent test scores and other data regarding the school system. If there are any changes you would recommend to the curriculum or any school policy which would improve the educational standards of the district, please discuss. Please describe the role of the board in addressing any concerns that it may have with test scores. Finally, state whether the

impact of recent test scores have a positive or negative effect on the administration, teachers and/or students.

Curriculum should be evaluated on an ongoing basis and be adapted as necessary. While test scores are important, the test scores should not be the sole indicator of a school's district success. For example, Nutley has a successful music program which has provided many opportunities to students to perform throughout the world. My nephew was part of the music program and received a scholarship to college due to his participation. This is something that a standardized test cannot capture. The Gifted & Talented program teaches children to think on their feet, critical thinking and problem solving - again these are skills that cannot be learned on standardized tests. Education is about developing well rounded students - the Board must not sacrifice programs such as these just to improve test scores. Test scores also do not account for parental involvement in a child's education process or in older children, their motivation to succeed.

Under current policy, the Superintendent reviews the curriculum and the Board must approve the curriculum on an annual basis. The curriculum must be consistent with the State standards and prepare students either for college or employment and provide instruction in such areas as history, civics, geography, performing arts, math, science, language arts etc. Opportunities for extracurricular activities should also be provided to students so that the District is developing well rounded students.

- 7) Interest in Public Service: Please state why do you want to serve on the Nutley Board of Education and how, as one voice of nine, you feel that you can bring measurable change to the board?

As a parent of a son in 4th grade at Spring Garden School, I want to help insure that he continues to get the best education possible. After serving on the Board of Trustees at my alma mater for over 2 years, I think I am now better qualified to sit on the Board. Many of the issues affecting our public schools are also affecting higher education. My experiences on the university board will help bring a new, fresh perspective to our local issues.

As for public service, before moving to Nutley I was involved in various volunteer events for the American Diabetes Association. I sat on the Board of Directors of the Southern Monmouth Area Chamber of Commerce and was President for 2 years.

I am currently a member of the St. Mary's Knights of Columbus and served as the Grand Knight. I have coached my son's flag football team, basketball team and baseball team. This year I am the manager of his farm league baseball team.

Measurable change, or any change really, has to start somewhere. I may be only one voice, but I am willing to be that voice that starts a debate, brings up a new outlook on an issue and strongly advocates what I feel is right. In my many years as an attorney I have had to both strongly defend an unpopular viewpoint, as well as bring consensus from widely differing parties - I know I can do both when required. To bring change to the Board, both skills will be necessary and I am confident I bring these skills to the table.

- 8) Candidates' Priorities: As a new board trustee what is the first thing you would work to change/improve within the school system?

The first major goal should be the hiring of a superintendent. Without effective leadership in the administration, the Board will have a tough time getting policies implemented. Then we need to take a good look at curriculum and academic programs, to make sure we are giving our children the best education we can. Our children didn't cause the budget crisis, so I don't think they should be the ones to suffer for it. I'd like to see academic programs and classes be the last things to be cut. We need to find creative ways to save money elsewhere when at all possible. As just one example, I would like to find a way for the Gifted & Talented Program to be restored to previous levels. During this school year there were reductions in the number of teachers, amount of class time for students and the elimination of the program for 3rd grade students. This program allows these special students to expand and grow in such areas as problem solving, critical thinking, and public speaking - and keep them working up to their full potential.

- 9) Qualifications of Candidates: What personal experiences will contribute to your qualification as a Board of Education member?

As I stated in a previous question, I will bring both a financial and a legal background to the Board. I feel that I can contribute an important and valuable set of skills and experience to the Board. I currently serve on the Board of Trustees for Alvernia University, Reading, PA. I sit on the finance, audit and mission effectiveness committees. Many of the issues affecting public education are also affecting higher education. While serving as a Trustee, I have been involved with reviewing and voting on budgets. The past year, the trustees had to review budgets based on the loss of both state and federal student aid, approval of faculty salary increases and reviewing reports on program accreditation. All of the decisions at the University are made with the Mission of the college as the focus.

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I also have a vested interest in seeing our schools continue to thrive so that my son gets the best education he possibly can - here in this great town.

And finally, as a taxpayer with two properties in town, I see things through the eyes of a concerned citizen - one who does not want to see property taxes continue to escalate at the rate they have been.