

**Philip Casale:**

**Response to information request.**

#1

I am a member of New Jersey Education Association, NJEA. I teach Health at Clifton High School and have done so for the past four years. The only impact this has on my position as a board member is that I am precluded from serving on the negotiating committee for matters dealing with NJEA. However, I am allowed to examine any proposed contracts and I may vote on all issues.

This does not preclude me from serving on negotiations for other bargaining groups such as Administrators and the Superintendent. Prior to becoming a teacher, I served on the negotiating committee for six years.

No member of my immediate family is employed by the Nutley School districts and I have no conflicts of interest in all other matters.

#2

I have reviewed the Code of Ethics. I have absolutely fulfilled the requirements during my tenure on the board. Certainly no one has been vetted more vigorously than I in this area.

It is essential to elect individuals with a commitment to the code of ethics. New board members are required to attend classes on this issue and we, as board members, are required to fulfill that commitment each year. Because the board is made up of nine individuals with individual vision on achieving common goals, it is absolutely essential that we adhere to the Code of Ethics.

#3

I see two major challenges facing the school district immediately and in the next five years. Those are curriculum and funding.

We need to continue to offer progressive and comprehensive curriculum in order to challenge and prepare our students for life. We must meet the needs of all students. We must have available the means by which every student can prosper to the best of their ability. From the special needs student to the most gifted student, we need to address all needs. Often overlooked are those students who are not self motivators or may not have a good support system at home. These students may achieve “decent” grades, but are not realizing their full potential. We need to offer them the ability to achieve that potential. A curriculum must be broad based to meet the needs of every category of student. It must help identify, through effective assessment, where students need more focus and motivation. It must challenge students while allowing them to achieve success when they apply themselves.

Secondly, we need resources to provide such a curriculum. In order to be successful we need human resources and financial sources. A well trained and motivated Superintendent and staff is essential. Using financial resources wisely is the next.

Funding education in New Jersey is also a great and immediate challenge. We need to find additional methods of funding education in New Jersey. Property taxes, as the main source of funding, are no longer a viable option. Grant writing is helpful, but also just another tool we can use. School districts must explore and pursue the position of professional fund raising. We need to have someone dedicated to finding sources of funding and revenue much like colleges and universities have done for generations. There is funding available in the private and corporate sectors that regularly give to these institutions. Why not us? I believe this to be the future of funding. This is an area we can begin to explore immediately.

We must indeed create a five year plan that includes this plan. We must also include in that plan maintenance and support for the investment we all made in our facilities. Having upgraded facilities is a nice asset, but we must not repeat the mistakes of prior boards by failing to take action. We must have a plan for supporting and maintaining these assets in a timely, structured and regular manner. It is much less expensive that way.

Finally, in the long term I believe we must take what ever action necessary to get our new Governor to examine the entire lottery system. If Governor Christie is so set on doing things a new way, he can start there. The lottery is supposed to help fund education. Technology should allow us to run that system with a fraction of the workers and expenses incurred. That would allow for more funds available for education and perhaps afford real property tax relief.

#4

The role of a board member is to hire and evaluate the Superintendent, set policy with the input from the Superintendent and approve a budget that the Superintendent structures with the Business Administrator.

All other contact with administrators and staff go through the Superintendent. This is done by receiving reports at meetings and in written form from staff, department heads and principals. The Superintendent may and has brought staff members to board and committee meetings to present ideas, programs and to clarify issues for the board.

The board may share with the Superintendent ideas, concepts or questions about goals and objectives, for example, but only the Superintendent has direct supervisory authority over all staff members.

The role of the Board of Education is to see that the schools are run successfully, not to run the schools. This requires good communication between the board and the Superintendent. This also requires input and participation of the entire board.

Moving forward, effectiveness can be maximized by open honest and regular communication between the Superintendent and administrators, teachers, and the union. The Superintendent in turn must then have effective communication with the board.

#5

A successful board of education is one that understands their role and keeps that in mind as they discharge their duties. An effective board recognizes we are nine individuals working for a common goal. Team work and communication are essential to success. A board member must remember that they are a representative of the citizens of Nutley and must base each decision on what is best for the children and citizens of the district. My experiences in life, my profession and as a board member have prepared me to continue to serve the district. I have sat on this board through many changes of members, majorities and two Superintendents. It has been my experience that we are most successful when we respect each other and keep moving towards our goals. I can say with confidence that this current board has done just that.

#6

We are currently revising the entire curriculum from Kindergarten through grade twelve. I believe this is a result of assessing test scores over the last five years. While this process is going on, we must keep in mind the goal is not to just have “new” curriculum that meets state standards, but to raise those standards and allow for yearly assessment and progress. It is not good enough to wait a number of years to do this. As I stated earlier, we must meet the needs of all students. Curriculum must be challenging and progressive. We must source outside of the district. Indeed, our administration has been collecting data from many sources to achieve this goal. This process has been going on for two years on a limited basis. Test scores over the past two years have reflected an improvement. But we must not be satisfied simply with improvement in some areas. It is simply a good beginning. District standards must continually be raised and assessed. Being a “good” school district is not enough. We need to be a progressive school district that continually strives to offer the best opportunities to our students.

The role of a board member in this area is to support the Superintendent and provide him or her with the tools necessary to achieve these goals. A board must communicate clear expectations to the Superintendent in all areas, not just test scores or curriculum. We must use our duty of Superintendent evaluation as a tool to encourage and assess if these goals are being met.

I believe the impact of recent test scores has both a positive and negative effect on administrators, teachers and students. It is a very broad brush to try and paint scores as either one or the other.

Test scores are only valuable when they are properly interpreted. Testing helps identify areas that need improvement as well as areas of strength. We must strive to go farther and use testing to determine what specific areas can be assessed. Is it curriculum or instructors or students or all of the above that needs to be enhanced and to what degree each?

#7

I wish to continue to serve the Nutley School district. I feel it is incumbent upon each one of us to contribute to our community on what ever level we are able. That's what makes a desirable community. I have lived in Nutley my entire life. I am a product of the town and school district. This experience has prepared me to provide a good life for my family. It is my privilege to have the opportunity to give back. I believe I have very effectively demonstrated my ability to work with my fellow board members.

#8

While I believe we need to continue to improve test scores and curriculum, I believe we have to continue to improve communication between the board and the community. I have strived to improve transparency on this board. I have taken action that includes every member of this board in every decision or issue that comes before us. Yet there is a poor perception of the district by some citizens. I believe the perception that we are a failing district in some circles, needs to be addressed. We are not perfect. We are not within easy reach of our goals. But we are surely moving in the right direction. Construction projects are back on schedule and within budget. Construction is taking place within the confines of what the state has approved. Test scores are improving. We have a ways to go, but I believe we are making progress and I am proud to have gone through and have my children go through the Nutley school system.

#9

My experience of being in private practice for twenty five years is certainly an asset. My experience working with people on all levels is also an asset. But more than this my experience as a productive member of the Nutley Board of Education is what allows me to continue to contribute in a most positive and productive manner. I have served on all committees at some time. I have brought many ideas and goals to the board during that time. I am proud to be part of a body that implemented new policies such as SAC counselors not only at the High School, but also the Middle and Elementary levels as well. Re-writing the drug policy, instituting the comprehensive residency verification program, adding number grades to transcripts, and implementing an extended day program that is a model for the state to name a few. I also support and am proud to be part of Mr. Zarra's plan for full day Kindergarten.