

**Robert Reid - PENN RFI Answers:**

- 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.

I do not have any relatives who are members of the local teacher's union. In addition, I do not have any familial relationships with anyone working for the Nutley school district. Taking the issue of potential conflicts a step further, it is also important to note that I do not have any relatives who are employed by the Township of Nutley or have businesses that receive any funding or contracts from either the Board of Education or the Township of Nutley.

My wife and I are both on faculty at Montclair State University and we are members of the Montclair State University Federation of Teachers AFT Local 1904. The AFT represents only faculty in higher education, and thus my membership will have no bearing on my role as a prospective BOE member.

By maintaining no conflicts, I will not have to recuse myself from any committee assignments (e.g., negotiations) and will be able to vote on all issues impacting our schools and community.

- 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 New Jersey School Ethics Act and am confident that I can adhere to its ethical requirements and fulfill my responsibilities as a BOE trustee. I intend to carry out the provisions of the code by confining my actions to "policy making, planning, and appraisal," and as your independent voice, I will not make "personal promises," and I refuse to surrender my judgment to special-interest groups. Additionally, I will not try to influence the hiring process and will work closely with the Superintendent to ensure that the "best-qualified personnel are appointed to their respective positions." I will also "support and protect school personnel in the proper performance of their duties."

I believe that the School Ethics Act merely provides a floor, not a ceiling, for strong ethical conduct. Therefore, as a prospective BOE member, I would like to strengthen Nutley's policies by implementing more transparent procedures for awarding service contracts from the Board of Education.

On March 4, 2010, the State Comptroller's Office issued a report titled "Best Practices for Awarding Service Contracts," and I would encourage the BOE to implement a number of those recommendations. For example, the report suggests that when considering service contracts, it is imperative that the pool of contractors be as expansive as possible. Additionally, a qualified evaluation committee should be established to implement merit-based evaluative criteria when awarding proposals. This will help reduce unnecessary expenditures, ensure efficiency, increase transparency, and reduce potential conflicts in the award of contracts for services. We need a BOE that has integrity and that can be held accountable for its decisions, and if I am entrusted with your vote, this will be a top priority.

- 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?

One of the more formidable challenges impacting our school district in the foreseeable future will be the severe state budget cuts imposed on public school education. Recent reports indicate that the reduction is much more worrisome than was originally proposed, with state aid to Nutley being reduced by 34%. This translates into an approximately \$2.7 million deficit in our school system's budget. Tighter fiscal controls and resourcefulness will be required to contend with this financial crisis. Additionally, the BOE needs to adopt bold and innovative strategies that will capitalize on opportunities that will bring external funding and resources into the district. However, despite these fiscally uncertain times, we must keep the promise of a quality education for our students and support the educators and school administrators whom we have asked to help guide them. I perceive that over the next five years, the BOE will be challenged with the following: 1) preserving and enhancing a strong educational system; 2) embracing ethics reform; and 3) recruiting strong and diverse educators for our schools through fair and open hiring practices.

- 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?

As an elected official, the role of a board member is to serve as the voice of the people and to represent the needs of students, parents, and community members in helping to deliver the best education possible for our students. To accomplish this task, it is imperative that board members work closely with the Superintendent to ensure that all recommended policies and programs and the school budget are aligned with the district's mission and priorities. As board members, we can contribute to this vision by helping to identify where we are going and what kind of school systems we are trying to create now and for the future.

It is not the responsibility of a board member to administer the schools; more important, it is the role of the Superintendent to interact with members of the administration and teachers. Board members should be actively engaged in evaluating the recommendations brought forth by the Superintendent “to establish high quality standards and system priorities focused on enhancing student achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

Interaction with the teacher’s union should take place through a committee structure. As a prospective BOE member with no conflicts of interest, I can serve as your independent voice on committee assignments involving discussions with the teacher’s union. One of my primary objectives as a BOE trustee is to raise student achievement and involve the educational community in the attainment of this goal. And a solid public school system is the best way to ensure a prosperous investment in our community.

- 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.

The BOE serves as the advocate for educational excellence for the community’s children and adolescents. Board members are entrusted to serve as fiduciaries to the public school system. The policies set forth by the BOE dictate the standards by which schools are run and the criteria used to evaluate whether they are being administered effectively. For example, the role of the BOE is not to serve as a day-to-day administrative body, but to be supportive and respectful of the Superintendent’s role as the chief educational officer of the district. The Board must ensure that the budget is fiscally sound, the leadership is focused, and the educational needs of all students remain a top priority. Additionally, the Board must guarantee that our educators have the critical resources that they need to teach our children and prepare them for rewarding tomorrows.

Through my teaching, service, and research responsibilities at Montclair State University, I have a proven track record of building successful collaborations with parents, students, school districts, and multiple Boards of Education in the state of New Jersey. If elected, I would bring leadership ability, fresh ideas, and project management skills to my role as a BOE trustee. I have experience serving and chairing numerous college-level committees, including curriculum development, faculty search, and the Department Personnel Advisory Committee. I believe that these skills will translate well to the Nutley Board of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Gemberling, K.W., Smith, C.W. & Villani, J.S. (2009). *The Key Work of School Boards*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association—2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

- 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.

**As a college professor, I understand the value of high standards, bold curriculum, and solid test scores. As recent state assessment scores suggest, we can do better, and we should do better; these sentiments were recently echoed by our Superintendent at the 1/25/2010 BOE meeting. Even when we do well, we need to challenge our educational community to reach higher. That is the promise of a quality education: not “settling” for what is good, but striving for what is greater.**

**Although test scores are an important metric of academic achievement, it is not the sole measure of student learning. For example, how do test scores measure the success of a school choir program? How do test scores measure whether students are making healthier choices to stay away from drugs, alcohol, and smoking? Lastly, how do standardized tests gauge whether students are acquiring the requisite skills to become tomorrow’s business leaders, police captains, or college professors? Simply stated, they do not. That is why we need to focus not only on standardized test performance, but rather on the complete picture of what makes for successful outcomes, and how to best measure this among our student population.**

**We need a challenging and innovative curriculum that takes into account new skills development so that our children are prepared for a different tomorrow, one in which they will all need to understand global trends, technology, financial literacy, and healthier life choices. By listening to our educators, we can provide them with the necessary resources and support to foster a lifelong commitment to learning among their 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?

**I am grateful for the caliber of education that I received throughout my formative years from the Nutley Public Schools. I was exposed to an educational ethos that prided itself on high-quality academic programs. There was a shared commitment among teachers, administrators, and the broader community to preserve this tradition of excellence. However, in recent years, we have been sidetracked from this mission. I believe that the BOE desperately needs to redirect its focus back on the business of academics by shaping policies that are beneficial for all of our students. As a father of a soon-to-be kindergartener, I**

want to ensure that my daughter reaps the same rewards that I received more than three decades ago.

As a prospective BOE member, one of my top priorities would be to reinstate the Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee and make academics a priority again by working with our Superintendent and administrators to explore innovative ways to raise the educational bar and by allocating the appropriate resources back into the classroom.

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

The budget crisis affecting our school district would be of immediate concern. I would work closely with our Superintendent to ascertain whether these far-reaching cuts will have dire consequences for our educational programs—e.g., will the curriculum review process be adversely affected, and how will this directly impact the quality of education that our children will receive? For example, it is now clear that we will have to contend with larger class sizes at the high school level, and time will tell what impact this will have on students' academic performance.

Understanding that the BOE will be faced with these pressing issues for years to come, it is imperative that the Superintendent, BA, and school administrators, with the support of the BOE, develop a strategic plan on how to contend with the fallout. A more pragmatic solution would be to identify alternative funding streams such as private, state, and federal grant opportunities. The BOE should also be encouraged to work closely with our Town Commissioners as an opportunity to identify and share resources. These are unprecedented times that will require a concerted effort by our community stakeholders to preserve and protect the future of Nutley's schools.

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

I am a product of the Nutley Public School System and benefited from a solid educational foundation that set the stage for my entire career. I furthered my education by receiving advanced degrees from Rutgers and Columbia University.

I began my career in the helping profession as a substance abuse counselor and social work supervisor at a drug treatment facility in Newark, NJ. I was also employed as a mental health clinician at a children's behavioral health agency in Newark, NJ. Through these experiences, I have worked in the trenches to help parents and families improve their opportunities and quality of life.

I am entering my eleventh year in academia and have served on the faculty at the School of Social Work, Rutgers University, and at Montclair State University. I am a tenured Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Child Studies, College of Education and Human Services, at Montclair State University. In addition to my time spent in the classroom, I am also a successful grant writer who has been awarded more than \$2.8 million in federal funding. Through these grant initiatives, I have designed and developed comprehensive substance

abuse and HIV/AIDS prevention programs targeting at-risk youth in the city of Paterson, NJ.

I believe that this combination of rigorous academic training, hands-on experience, and strong professional background makes me a powerful advocate for progress on the Nutley Board of Education. I have committed both my personal and professional life to the service of others, and now I believe it is time for me to direct this hard work and determination to my hometown of Nutley.