



To: Parents' Educational Network of Nutley

From: Victoria A. Flynn

Date: April 20, 2011

Re: Board of Education Election - April 27, 2011

Kindly accept the following responses to the requests for information you have sent to candidates for the upcoming Board of Education election. Please advise if there is any additional information you would need regarding my candidacy. Otherwise, I invite you to visit my website www.voteformickyflynn.com for additional information about me.

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.

Response: There are no conflicts which would prevent me from participating in the negotiating process for, or voted upon, any professional or staff contracts on behalf of the Nutley Board of Education. Further, I am not related to anyone who is employed by 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.

Response: Yes, I have reviewed the State School Ethics Act and intend to comply with the standards set forth in the Act if elected to the Nutley Board of Education. I appreciate the importance of the standards set forth therein, which are to ensure that the decision-making process of the Board of Education is not compromised by a personal relationships and/or personal business interests of individual board members. The Code of Ethics reminds Board members that they shall not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the school district, but instead, those matters shall be left to the Superintendent, the administrators, the teachers and staff. I intend to comply with those standards.

In my legal practice, I am required to adhere to high standards of conduct, and in connection with the representation of clients, I am required to adhere to the fiduciary duty of undivided loyalty to my clients. Board members have a similar fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interests of the children of the district.

As a Board member, I will comply with the ethical standard set forth in the School Ethics Act that I exercise my “independent judgment” in making decisions, and will comply with the requirement that all decisions are made in the best educational welfare of the children of the district.

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?

Response: The Board’s ability to allocate resources necessary to prepare the students for their future is the biggest challenge for the school district, both long-term and short-term. It is reasonably foreseeable that, in this economic climate, the ability to meet the educational needs of the children will continue to be challenging because state aid is uncertain and taxpayers are unable to absorb any significant tax increases.

Thus, the Board must invest the public’s dollars wisely, and invest in those areas where they will have the largest impact. In furtherance of this commitment, I will carefully scrutinize expenditures and ensure the budget reflects the district’s educational priorities. The development of a budget strategy, which accounts for unanticipated financial challenges and forecasts for future liabilities, will enhance the Board’s ability to address the educational needs of the students in the future.

Another significant short-term challenge for the district is to secure the services of an excellent superintendent, as well as fill the spots of some of the key administrative positions in the district (i.e., high school principal, elementary school principal, special services). I am pleased that the Board of Education utilized the services of a professional search firm to locate a candidate for the superintendent position, and I am confident that the Board will locate a superintendent to continue to move the district forward.

However, it is critical that once the superintendent is selected, the Board must conduct a fair and rigorous evaluation of the superintendent, holding that individual to the highest standards, to ensure that the needs of the students are being met by the leaders of our school system. Thus, the Board, in the short term, should establish concrete goals for the school district so that the new superintendent understands those standards which he or she will be evaluated against by the Board, as well as develop those standards, with the superintendent, that all administrative members of the school district shall adhere to in order to achieve the educational goals of the district.

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?

Response: Interaction by members of the Board of Education with administration and teachers should be limited to those interactions permitted by law. Indeed, members of the Board of Education are not permitted to be involved with the day-to-day management of the schools and any promises or commitments made by an individual board member lack any legal basis. Instead, the Board of Education shall engage in a dialogue with the superintendent to ensure that the superintendent is carrying out the policies of the school district, and above all, that the schools are being well-run. As for the teacher's union, the Board shall only interact with the union and its members in accordance with the terms of the contract, and most importantly, only with the school superintendent present so that everyone is always on the same page.

To be an effective Board, its members should establish a collaborative relationship with the teachers, administration and the community, as well as establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals. I would therefore favor that the Board and Superintendent hold meetings with teachers, parents, members of the community, etc., to create an open dialogue that helps identify ways in which the school district can move forward.

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.

Response: First and foremost, it is important that Board members appreciate their responsibility to act in accordance with the highest standards. Thus, it is important that Board members are honest, sincere, respectful, as well as capable of dealing with challenging issues, accepting of criticism and willing to take responsibility for actions that may not have panned out as initially expected.

Board members should also demonstrate a commitment to education and be willing to engage in research to learn about those issues facing school districts. This commitment will allow board members to engage in meaningful dialogue at open public meetings, as well as modify existing policies or draft new policies. Board members should attend classes and seminars regarding educational-related matters, as well as Board governance issues.

In sum, a board member must be a leader, must demonstrate a willingness to continue to learn and work with others, and must be committed to addressing the needs of the district.

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.

Response: While there is so many areas in the school district that are performing well, test scores for the district demonstrate there is still room for improvement, especially in the area of academics. I believe that, as a district, we should never be completely satisfied with our performance, and always be willing to improve. Indeed, the most successful schools are always determined to strive for improvements within their own school districts.

Test scores are important in helping to identify areas which require immediate attention for school districts. I do not think they should be ignored, but instead, the data generated by those test scores should be embraced as a means to provide solutions to shortcomings in the school district. One of the immediate tasks for the new Superintendent should be to develop a plan to improve test scores, with the assistance of the administrators and teachers of the school district. That plan should be presented to the Board, and evaluated on a regular basis.

I believe that the curriculum for the school district should constantly be reviewed for improvement. I would even favor the adoption of those curricula from other successful school districts to be applied here in Nutley. As a Board member, I would expect the Superintendent to provide a continuous update regarding updating of the curriculum.

Test scores are improving, which is a positive development and reflects favorably upon the work of our teachers and students. However, there is still a great deal more that needs to be done. Our school system is the backbone of our Township. Indeed, the reputation of our Township depends heavily upon the successes of our school district. Thus, the Board should be focused on developing policies, with the Superintendent, administration and teachers, to allow our school district to commence upon a path to improve its academic reputation in the State of New Jersey. Improvement of test scores must be a priority in that planning process.

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?

Response: I have been attending school board meetings for the past few years, and have always been an active participant at those meetings. Some of the issues that have concerned me involve the school construction projects. Attending those meetings, I was surprised to learn that the Department of Education has found the district failed to comply with basic public contracting rules in its school construction projects, which could eventually result in a loss of state aid. Further, there have been meetings I have attended where the state has notified the district of other legal deficiencies.

It is important to have Board members that are able to address those situations, hold people accountable, and adopt policies to prevent those matters from repeating those mistakes in the future. Any waste with public dollars is unfair to the children and taxpayers of this Township. I believe I have the skill set to assist the Board on such matters, and will be an advocate for careful scrutiny of expenditures for the Board.

My goal in attending and speaking up at the public meetings of the Board of Education has always been motivated by my desire to help and to ensure that this district provides an excellent education to the students of the district. My college and legal education have provided me with a solid foundation needed to be successful as a lawyer. I am therefore interested in providing a voice to ensure that our children are provided with an outstanding education, which will provide them with an ability to succeed in their future upon graduation from this school district.

It is also my interest in public service that has motivated me to run for the Board of Education. Throughout my life, I have been an active participant in my community and schools. Presently, I serve as a Trustee of the Nutley Library, and am an active member of the Women's Initiative of Nutley, League of Women Voters, and American Association of University Women. I also served as president of the Nutley Junior Women's Club.

I believe I can bring measurable change to the Board, despite only being one voice of nine. I understand to some, it may be difficult to find a voice over the chatter of other voices. However, I can utilize those techniques I have developed as an attorney in conveying my thoughts to my fellow board members, especially on complex legal issues, to develop a strategy that works best for the district. I hope I can encourage others to engage in a dialogue at public meetings so that the public is aware of the decision-making process of the Board.

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

Response: Studies have shown that parent and family involvement increases student achievement. By engaging the public in the issues facing the school district, the Board can more effectively develop solutions for the district.

In furtherance of this goal, I would like to see the utilization of computer program that allows parents to access vital information about their children's performance on a day-to-day basis, rather than having to wait for report cards. Many school districts utilize such computer programs, which even allow parents to view homework assignments, have information needed about upcoming exams and view test results as soon as they are recorded. It is long overdue for this district and will open up a dialogue between parents and teachers.

I would also encourage the issuance of a newsletter by the Board of Education to members of the community, which advises them of issues addressed by the Board. I would also encourage the Board send out an update in advance of Board meetings to parents or community members who sign up to receive those newsletters.

I also would like to have a better sense of our procurement needs for the near future. I believe that the Board should utilize an open and fair process for all matters, including professional service contracts. Greater transparency and creating more trust between the public and the Board would be a priority for me as a Board member.

Finally, I would encourage the Board to utilize the skills of members of our community. Community involvement is a critical component in improving the school district and I think we are underutilizing the skills of our community.

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

Response: It is important to me that the children of this district are exposed to a rigorous and meaningful education. It is irrefutable that a high-quality education provides the best chance for our children to succeed in the future.

I understand the importance of a strong educational foundation for our children's future. Despite personal roadblocks in my past, my commitment to education has allowed me to achieve my dream of becoming a lawyer. I first attended Rutgers College, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1996. In 1999, I graduated with a Juris Doctoris (*cum laude*) from Seton Hall Law School. Following law school, I earned a judicial clerkship for the New Jersey Supreme Court. Currently, I am a partner at a large law firm in the State of New Jersey, working in

our firm's Litigation and Governmental Affairs practice groups. I credit my educational background for equipping me with the skills necessary to be successful in my career.

As a student, I was always more appreciative of those educational experiences that challenged me as compared to those that did not. Thus, I will impress upon our school leaders the need to challenge themselves and students to move this district forward.

I have also seen the difference of a great leader in providing an excellent environment to learn. Those are the type of characteristics I would like to see in the next leader for the Nutley school district, and I intend to hold the superintendent to high standards to ensure that our children are provided with a tremendous educational experience.

In my legal practice, I am familiar with the issues that face public entities. I have advised public entities on various issues, including public bidding, public contracting, and employment. As a member of the Board of Trustees for the Nutley Public Library, I am also aware of the high standards imposed upon members of public boards and commit to adhere to those standards if elected.

I have attended many Board of Education meetings over the past few years, and have been persistent in my position that the Board must adhere to best practice standards in all procurement decisions. I would also encourage the Board to continue to adopt policies that provide better means of communication with the community.

Finally, and most importantly, I will bring my experience as a parent to the Board of Education. My husband and I want our three girls to be exposed to a meaningful education. We have been pleased with the instruction provided to our eldest daughter at Lincoln School, which she has attended since she has was three years old, attending our school's early intervention program.

Thus, I believe my interest as a parent, my legal background, my commitment to education, and my interest in public service will allow me to serve as an effective member of the Nutley Board of Education.