League of Women Voters of Norwalk

Voter Guide 2013

Board of Education At-Large Candidates

The League thanks this year's Common Council and Board of Education Candidates for answering the eight written questions. We want to thank ALL of the candidates for appearing this evening and for answering the League's eight written questions. A 250 –word limit to each question was enforced. If a candidate went over their word count – their response was cut at the 250th word. Other than that, the League did not edit, proof or spell check their responses.

The League changed the question format this year by going BACK to a written *Voter Guide*. This was done for the following reasons:

- Maintain fairness to all candidates by giving them an equal voice on each of the 8 questions
- Avoid the 'secrecy' issue of questions or concerns of the questions 'leaking out' prior to the event
- Raise the bar and quality of answers by giving candidates time to think about their responses
- Enable more accountability and transparency by providing a written record of candidate positions
- Create the ability to share responses with a greater audience than those attending the forums

Copies of all questions can be found at www.thehour.com and www.nancyonnorwalk.com. If you have any questions, please contact the LWVN at lwv.norwalk@gmail.com

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Candidate: John Bazzano (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. **If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them.** First off, being a new member of the Board, I do not expect that my top three priorities be the Board's top three priorities. Second, although I have a personal "top three", the implementation of them is not my first priority. Rather, I would spend a great amount of energy in listening to all on whatever the matter at hand is, understanding the facts, questioning the data, understanding people's motivation, try and understand all sides of the issues, and finally contributing with my own assessment of the situation. My experience in the business world has taught me that there is never a shortage of opinions and agendas, and always a drought of meaningful analysis, questioning of the data, and vetting out of the possible solutions.
   Be that as it may, below are my current top three priorities:
   a. Creating a Board that is more transparent and responsive to the stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, teachers, taxpayers, etc.). This could be implemented by using the local media to publish the issues the BoE is addressing, with resolutions. Also, establishing a system to track all correspondence to/from the BoE and make sure an intelligent and timely response is provided.
   b. Since we have a new Superintendent, the BoE must thoroughly understand his vision and his plans on implementation.
   c. Understand the BoE's finances and assist in planning for the future.

2. **On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member?**
   Personal:
   a. *Being a parent of three girls*. Understanding the issues, challenges, joys, and disappointments they face has taught me much about today's culture, schools, and generally what kids today have to deal with on a daily basis. This experience and knowledge has taught me to think "outside the box", even outside my comfort zone.
   b. *As a volunteer for Junior Achievement* within NYC's public schools I've seen and experienced a great deal, both from the teacher's point of view and the students. I've witnessed oversized classes, lack of school supplies, kids falling asleep at their desk, great teachers, and poor teachers.
   c. *As Adjunct Professor at NYU, I've learned how to communicate complex, and often new (to the student), concepts and ways of thinking*. This has stretched my communication skills and afforded me the experience of translating hard concepts to people that are learning it for the first time.

   Professional:
   a. My 30 years of finance and client management experience would be of great help to the BoE in all financial and managerial matters. To be successful in my field, one must be a strong negotiator and listener. Understanding when to fight for your beliefs, how to debate without causing acrimony, all skills critical to my success and transferable to the BoE.
   b. During my career, I had many managerial positions where hired, fired, and helped improve an employee's performance. Personnel matters are at the heart of my professional experience, all of which I can bring to the BoE.

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Candidate: John Bazzano (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

3. **The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making.**

   Personal: In 2005, my wife and I had to decide whether to renovate our house, or move. The following data points needed to be examined:

   - Scope of project
   - Choosing an architect, refine scope
   - Selection of contractors
   - Bid the job. Compare bids, what's realistic, what's not? Reliability and reputation of contractor
   - Sourcing of funds. What combination of equity vs. debt?
   - Research availability and costs of homes in the neighborhoods of choice
   - Compare the results/data of buying vs. renovating
   - Understand the risks. What's Plan B if something goes wrong?
   - Do a subjective review.
   - Decide.

   Professional: In 2006, an important client requested me to bid on a $500 million dollar construction loan for the financing of a major NYC office building. The market dynamics and data pointed me to recommending this loan for Bank approval, which I received. Competitors analyzed the same data, and received their approvals; all data pointed to a grand slam. As such multiple bids were provided to the developer and bidding among banks became intense. This multiple

   Re-bidding caused the loan structure being offered to be weaker and less prudent. Finally, despite the strong data, I chose to stop bidding as the loan structure became too weak and risky. Fortunately for my employer and me, I did, as an unforeseen bad economy caused major financial distress to this project and the lender. Lesson learned? Strong data isn't the only metric one should consider when making a major decision.

4. **What is your position on charter schools and other public-private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers?** I'm a firm believer in the free market and the choices it provides to the end user. In the case of education, one needs to be open to a variety of ways of delivering a quality education to our most precious citizens, our children. Further, parents should be provided with the ability to choose how their children are educated; either a public school, a non-traditional public school (charters) or a private school.

   In the case of a private school, government provided vouchers for families that are unable to afford a private education should most definitely be allowed. I find it ironic how the same people who fight for public assistance (i.e., housing, food stamps, etc.) are many times the same people who fight against vouchers. Wouldn't vouchers help the financially disadvantaged as well? What's their motivation/logic?

   This argument is especially true in areas where the public schools have failed in providing children with a proper education. A monopoly, especially when the product provided is bad, is never a good system with which to deliver a product, in this case, education.

   I understand that charters haven't always provided a better alternative. But my understanding is that on a nationwide basis, charters have performed well, continue to improve, and have shown a dramatic improvement in scholastic results for Hispanic and Black communities.

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Candidate: John Bazzano (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

5. **Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships?** Anyone running for the Board of Education who is not prepared to work with others, listen to the needs of the community, and establish a productive relationship with other Board members should end their campaign immediately. The enacted Code of Civility is a good resolution/code to have in place, but it is also a shame that one is needed in the first place. Being civil and even-tempered is fairly easy when the problems are minor and there aren't many bumps in the road. As problems intensify and there's more on the line, relationships can fray and at times discussions become heated; this is only natural and should be expected as each individual feels much passion about their position.

   By the same token, one should not confuse vigorous debate with being uncivil. Provided all parties respect one another and control themselves, a very productive and civil meeting can take place within a contentious environment.

   Throughout my career, I've handled small and very large issues. The best example of my ability to foster collaborative relationships in a "high tension" environment is when I worked on problem loans. The goal of restructuring these loans was to come up with a solution/loan structure that the Client and Bank could live with; knowing full well that one or both parties could lose substantial sums of money. This was accomplished by always keeping a cool head, removing any and all emotion, and lastly, never taking the "last dollar" from the table.

6. **What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs, of all children?**
   The question suggests that the school system is not meeting the needs of all children; especially the free and reduced lunch population. Since I do not have concrete data with which to base an opinion, answering this question without a lot of platitudes is nearly impossible. As such, I will answer this question only by stating that I believe in assisting those in need of help. I've lived my life that way, and I expect to bring that sentiment to the BoE.

7. **What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers?** I believe that "Balance" is the ultimate goal of the BoE and its members. The difficult thing about "Balance" is that it's relative; as one person's balance can be another person's chaos.

   In my opinion, the BoE serves two masters, the parents/children are one, and the taxpayers the other. When they overlap, one's decisions are easier to be perceived as balanced. It's when they don't overlap, and their interests are far apart, is when the heavy lifting of finding "Balance" comes into play.

   Jack Welch said, "There's no such thing as work-life balance. There are work-life choices, and you make them, and they have consequences". In my opinion, that quote can be extrapolated to a more general statement on balance. We make choices; and every choice we make has consequences. As such, recognizing that balance, at least how the individual perceives it, is a choice, we recognize that it's also in our own control.

   With that as a backdrop, what I would do to ensure reasonable balance is:

   - Understand the needs of all stakeholders
   - Seek and understand all the options available to us in order to make a proper decision.
   - Determine the impact and consequences to the parties that will be affected.
   - Listen to the other BoE members and others in the community
   - When a decision is made, see it through and don't be afraid to make a mistake. And if we do make a mistake, take ownership, recognize it, and correct it.

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Candidate: John Bazzano (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interest and or concerns you the most?

I have learned the following:

- We are slowly narrowing the achievement gap.
- The City of Norwalk, via the Common Council and BoE, continues to pay very competitive salaries to teachers and staff.
- The Mayor has invested heavily in maintaining and improving the physical structure of our school buildings.
- Our schools are safe, and getting safer.

What concerns me the most:

- While narrowing, there are too many students performing at a low level.
- Bullying, in all forms: Although great strides have been made at the state legislative level and the local BoE level, the message has not gotten through to our schools. Schools are not properly documenting, investigating, or taking claims of bullying seriously enough.
- Not enough of our High School graduates are being accepted to Ivy League schools.
- The perception of our schools has not improved.
- Governor Malloy is seriously shortchanging the City of Norwalk. We are perceived as being part of the "rich" Fairfield County and as such, the City's allocation of state funds is woefully inadequate.

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Candidate: Steve Colarossi (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? My top three priorities are: (1) Improving the education we provide all of our children; (2) Improving the transparency and efficiency of the budget process so that the budget which is produced reflects the true needs of our public schools; and (3) Improving the responsiveness of the Board of Education so that parent and taxpayer concerns are addressed.

To improve education:

- **a.** The Board of Education must consider educational needs and affordability, and not political interests. The superintendent of schools should serve as the chief negotiating officer, with advice and consent from the Board of Education, on staff contracts. That way, issues which could improve education (such as longer school days and a longer school year) are considered with critical financial concerns, rather than bumper-sticker issues.
- **b.** We must remain committed to the alternative program at Briggs High School and to maintain current vocational programs.
- **c.** We must improve how we teach our children to read. Changes to our English Language Arts curriculum must be made and political machination impeding those changes must end.
- **d.** We must undertake the comprehensive review I have long called for to determine why so many families feel shut-out of the special education process and improve delivery of services to these children.
- **e.** Given the importance of the built environments on student learning, we must undertake an on-going comprehensive review of school use (such as the one I initiated as Finance Committee Chairperson in 2010) and evaluate how to reduce overcrowding in classrooms.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? My record serving the needs of our families, students and taxpayers, and standing up to political influences in the process, is the reason I would vote for me on Row D-- the Norwalk Community Values party line.

I have educational experience- I have served as pro bono counsel to pre-school programs and was a Massachusetts high school teacher. As an attorney, I have served as a guardian-ad-litem, court investigator for child abuse and neglect cases, juvenile public defender and educational advocate for my young clients and their families. I'm an active school volunteer, and have been a former co-president of the Naramake PTO, coach in the Norwalk Junior Soccer Association and Norwalk Hospital volunteer.

The breadth of my experience and community involvement (like Andres Roman's experience) provides insight into the practical needs of our families and children, and the challenges of implementing changes on the school and classroom level.

But, no amount of practical experience can take the place of having a fundamental belief (as I do) that all of the citizens of Norwalk deserve to have a voice in the decisions that are made affecting our schools and our children. The families who entrust their children to our schools—and the taxpayers who fund our school system- are my neighbors and friends- they are the parents and grandparents of my daughters' friends—they are the families of the kids I've coached in soccer. They each deserve no less than open, honest and transparent representation on our Board of Education.

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Candidate: Steve Colarossi (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. When you think of it, data is merely objective criteria that allow for evaluation of a proposal or program. Data and other objective information is critical to decision making—however, as a school board, we are in the business of educating children, and we cannot lose sight of the profound impacts our decisions have on families.

From 2009 to 2012, when I served as Chairperson of the Finance Committee, I regularly insisted upon receiving comprehensive impact statements and implementation plans for proposed budget cuts (and was regularly shocked by the reluctance of administrations to provide such detailed, critical and necessary information). I also insisted that we review the basis for all budgetary assumptions and critically evaluate each line item. The thoroughness of the analysis I initiated led to savings being found so that when no increase was provided the school department in 2010, no appreciable cuts needed to be made in any area affecting student learning. Similarly, when closing the Norwalk High School pool was trotted out as a means to balance the 2011 school budget, I was able to highlight the deficiencies of those cost estimates and convince my colleagues to not even consider such a preposterous suggestion.

Similarly, when faced with overcrowding in some of our schools, and the need to utilize portable classrooms to accommodate growing student populations, I led the effort to initiate a comprehensive school use and population study to best decide how to allocate future capital expenditures on school improvements and expansions.

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public-private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? Charter schools are entirely regulated by the state; local boards of education have neither authority over their development nor control over their operations. Local school boards should not impede parent groups and related community-based organizations from organizing charter schools. Local school boards should, however, meet community members who seek to organize charter schools to determine if the needs those concerned parties feel will be met by a charter school can be met by the public schools.

Local school boards do have authority to develop inter-district magnet schools. These programs, by providing a critical mass of students (and their accompanying state education dollars) from other districts, can allow a school district to develop programs of particular importance to local students. I am strongly in favor of developing an additional inter-district magnet program in Norwalk and believe that such a program with a focus on special needs students would provide community-based learning opportunities for our children, reduce their time being bused to out-of-district programs and produce savings to the taxpayers.

The Norwalk Board of Education would have no authority to issue private school vouchers to families sending their children to private schools. The local school board must address the reasons why families send their children to private and parochial schools- if there are unmet community needs or widespread concerns about the local educational programs, then the Board of Education must address those concerns as the Board of Education must recognize its obligation to serve all Norwalk citizens.

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Candidate: Steve Colarossi (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? My leadership of the Finance Committee (2009-2012) and my service as Chairperson of the Policy Committee has been marked by a collaborative approach in which all who attend are invited to sit around the table with the members and contribute to the discussions. As a result, the Policy Committee forged a very cooperative relationship with students from the Center for Youth Leadership- they work with us for more than 12 months to draft an expanded bullying policy which addresses adult-on-adult bullying and adult-on-student bullying.

When I have worked on budget reviews, I have undertaken comprehensive efforts to meet with department heads, principals, teachers, students, parents and taxpayers. That work resulted in knowledge about what would be the true impact of proposed budget cuts and encouraged me (as I did from 2009 to 2012) to look for alternatives areas of savings and reduction.

I have worked to encourage uniform rules for Board of Education meetings (such as policy initiatives I drafted to allow for direct answering of questions from the public during the public comment part of meetings) which, when applied, encourage open and honest debate.

I have also defended my fellow Board members when I felt that they have been bullied and have defended staff members when they have been subject to unfair attacks. We should all engage in probing, thoughtful questioning, but we must draw the line at personal attacks.

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs, of all children? The research is very clear that children born in poverty did not have the same print-rich environments to which more affluent students have access. That is why I was adamant in my displeasure when a much needed reform of our reading program for grades kindergarten to grade five was stalled due to undue political influences. When I return for my second term, I intend to work with the superintendent on bringing forward the plan proposed by the reading experts to introduce a much improved reading program that offers leveled readers and differentiated texts for our students of diverse abilities.

I have also been a strong advocate of quality before and after school care that is affordable. I am proud of my past service on the Board of Directors and as pro bono counsel to the Naramake Family Resource Center which provided tutoring services and homework help along with fun activities for students, and which was entirely self-funded (meaning that there was no need for subsidies from the taxpayers).

Research also tells us that at-risk students suffer most from crowded classrooms. That is why I fought against the overcrowding of the 2012-2013 budget and why I will continue to fight for Norwalk's at-risk children. Every child deserves the type of quality education which our taxpayers generously fund- we can do more for them without further burdening the taxpayers by improving our budget process.

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Candidate: Steve Colarossi (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? When I began my service on the Board of Education in 2009 and was Chairperson of the Finance Committee, I undertook a comprehensive review of every line item of the school budget, and was shocked at the mismanagement, miscalculations and mistakes that riddled that document. Over the years, with the service of our last two Chief Operating Officers, we have been able to create a more accurate budget and avoid the scare tactics that were once used to justify increasing school budgets rather than finding greater efficiencies (as I have advocated). Unfortunately, despite the progress that had been made, political considerations, rather than continuing the reform of the budget process, crept back into the 2012 process when I was the lone dissenting vote on a budget that included cuts for which no adequate plans or impact statements had been prepared.

My commitment to true reform- my commitment to serving all students and taxpayers- was no more evident than in my preparing a revenue-neutral Kids First Alternative Budget Plan that relied upon savings and cuts in less-critical areas than those which had been proposed and passed by the majority. Fiscal reform requires accountability. As I've demonstrated, I believe that all those with any spending authority must explain their expenditures and provide evidence of their plan to keep future spending in line with budgetary limits (even Board of Education members when spending taxpayer funds on legal fees).

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interest and or concerns you the most? It's amazing what you can learn by listening to others. I am shocked that so many parents of special needs students do not feel that administrators listen to their needs, and those feelings have been corroborated by my uncovering budget expenditures of direct payments to select families whose children had been denied promised services.

I've also been encouraged, however, by getting to know so many teachers, the overwhelming majority of whom put the needs of their students first and foremost in their lives.

We have an amazingly generous community that supports the education of our children- we need to respect their sacrifices and continue to improve the budget process so that the document presented to the City is accurate and is focused on improving student learning.

I have also learned that colleagues with whom I once strongly disagreed are caring thoughtful people who look beyond party affiliation to serve the best interests of our students, families and taxpayers.

Finally, I have been saddened by the intent political pressure to keep misspending, improper hirings and lack of oversight from full public scrutiny. But, that is why I am running on a new party line (the Norwalk Community Values line, Row D on the ballot) and why I feel honored to support our efforts to free the Norwalk Board of Education from politics as usual.

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Candidate: Sherelle Harris (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? All the best laid plans in education won't get out of the gate if we don't get a handle on literacy. I understand that a teacher can have two students in the same class with the same instruction. One excels. The other doesn't. I understand that w have language barriers. I understand that there are high expectations in some instances and low standards in others. I know we have parental involvement in some cases. In other cases we do not. At this point I don't think I'm interested in the blame game as much as I'm interested in embracing Norwalk demographics to better serve all students equally and agreeing on a curriculum that raises the bar across the board in literacy.
I would continue to support early childhood education to give a head start to all children and particularly those who don't have the benefit of parents who think literacy is important. This is also where early intervention of ADD/ADHD, developmental delays, etc. can take place before things get out of hand and before self-esteem is affected.
Creating an inclusive environment where each student feels valued is a step toward closing the achievement gap.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? Having a child in the Norwalk Public School System gives me a vested interest.
I have a B.A. in Journalism and a M.S. in Library and Information Science. I've worked as a freelance writer for a variety of magazines and as a features writer for *The Hour* newspaper. I managed a children's library for 13 years and established the young adult collection for the Norwalk Public Library System. These positions enabled me to understand Norwalk from a broad perspective. Being on the Norwalk Early Childhood Council and being a 2011 Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce Leadership Institute graduate have given me both a focused and an even broader perspective respectively. I have a serious respect for education and I've always introduced educational and entertaining programs that reflect the majority of the cultures in Norwalk. As a librarian without walls, my extensive community outreach has included hosting successful book clubs in housing projects, elementary schools, at NEON, Inc. and Stepping Stones Museum for Children. My first children's story, "Rules! Rules!!" appeared in *Highlights for Children* and has been used in educational settings in the state of Georgia. An academic librarian from North Carolina nominated me for a national library advocacy award, which I received, for my work in Norwalk with our team. Every time I see that plaque I am humbled by his recognition and reminded not to lose the passion I had at the onset of my career. I am currently the Assistant Director of the Norwalk Public Library System.

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. As a librarian I look at circulation statistics to see what our patrons are interested in and purchase accordingly. Program attendance is indicative of the programs our patrons like most and least. Sometime we find areas that need revamping. For instance, our adult book club attendance began to dwindle. We decided to add a movie to the program. The movie version of the book is screened after a discussion of the book. This month's selection was David Elkind's *The Hurried Child*. We screened the documentary *Race to Nowhere* afterward (When we don't have a movie version of a book, we make sure the book and movie are similar). That session was very successful. We also created a different type of book club for children called Folkore @4:00. I'd heard teachers say children are entering school without much knowledge of classics. During this book club, children read along during a PowerPoint presentation of the book and the staff ran with it. The program includes games, crafts and treats.
As for Norwalk Public Schools, I've read the GE, the Cambridge Education, and the CREC reports. From the outside it is easy to label the issues as adult focused vs. child focused. Being on the inside will provide a clearer vantage and the ability to be part of the solution. The bright side is that some children are receiving a good education in our school system. We need to make the case as far across the board as we can. We need balance.

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Candidate: Sherelle Harris (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers?

This is a tough one.

I'm not against charter schools, particularly if the public feels their public schools aren't meeting their needs. However, I don't understand why we don't have the same expectations for public schools that we have for charter schools.

As for vouchers, as a parent I want the best education possible for my children even if that meant having my tax dollars follow them elsewhere if they are in failing schools. Additionally, low-income families are often in neighborhoods that may have failing schools. Without vouchers they won't have choices, whereas affluent families have the money or resources to get their children the help they need or to send them to better schools.

On the flipside, as part of a governing body, I would need information as to why the school is failing. Have we done everything we can do to improve the school? Will taking money away from the school make it even worse? I would have to see how the dollars are spent to see if we could get to a win-win for everyone. Ideally, it would be best to strengthen the failing school(s) because vouchers take away money from our public schools. We'd make private schools better at the expense of our public schools. We should try to improve our school(s) first with the money allocated for our public system which would get worse if we took money away from it. We should work on parent-teacher partnerships to ensure the best interest of the child.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships?

I like the idea of bridging the divide between teachers, students and parents while holding all equally accountable. Norwalk ACTS has great community partners rallying around the success of our students. I wish more parents knew more about the organizations Norwalk ACTS is comprised of in order to bring a diverse perspective. We still have a ways to go with really listening to and understanding each other.

I have partnered with many organizations in my work as a librarian from SoNo Alliance (screening of *The Interrupters*) to the Norwalk Education Foundation (screenings of *American Teacher*, *Waiting for Superman*, etc.). I've had a panel of teachers to speak on their own behalf and answer questions from the audience. Policemen have listened to the community's thoughts on violence. I've enlisted the help of many people from all walks of life for my Boys to Men and Girls to Women book clubs for teens. I am gifted in listening and knowing where the real needs are, and fostering collaborative relationships. I have worked with most of the agencies in Norwalk. I would love to continue this type work with the Norwalk Public School System. It might also be time to hold forums and educational screenings in neighborhoods where parents may have difficulty attending programs. Some elected officials set aside time in different parts of Norwalk for their constituents to come and speak to them. It might be good for the Board of Education members to hold sessions open to teachers, students and parents.

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Candidate: Sherelle Harris (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children?
Research indicates that eating habits affect student performance and health. Hungry children may have difficulty concentrating and learning.
I like that there is are two "boxes" with free and reduced lunch applications right as you come off of the elevator on the third floor at City Hall. One is in English. The other is in Spanish, so that helps with any language barrier. There are a few things I might suggest. Is the form as user-friendly as it can be? Could the form and the process be a bit simpler? If a family is receiving cash assistance, should the automatically be enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program? When families enroll their children in the program, be sure there is someone who speaks Spanish or Kreyol (or another prominent language spoken in Norwalk) to help with the process. Could we use our partnership with the Early Childhood Office to strengthen the process? At present I believe there is a form sent to the preschools when their students are ready to enter kindergarten asking who the emigrant families are. There might also be a form sent to the preschools asking who qualifies for free and reduced lunch.
We would also want to look into Title I which distribute funds to schools and districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families to help our schools that qualify with services that make for better student achievement.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? The board and administration would look at the relationship between enrollment and resource allocation and agree on a set of clear and measurable goals to detect issues and progress early on. We would look at the budget to see how much of it is actually going to the classroom and devise budgets with fiscal sensitivity to the entire community. We don't want to pit tax payers, senior citizens or those who live on fixed incomes against the school system and we want to make sure teachers have the resources they need to be successful in the classroom.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most?
Having a diverse set of talents on the board of education is important.
The percentage of the budget that goes to the classroom is something I want to know more about.
Because many children are entering middle school and high school unprepared, I am looking at how much money we spend at the elementary school level where students should receive the foundation needed for academic success.
I am concerned about the teaching of reading beyond third grade. What happens if a child falls behind in reading in fourth and/or fifth grades? Are teachers at that level prepared to help them?
Marketing education vs. educating
We shouldn't make people superstars before they have a chance to prove themselves. We should wholeheartedly support and help to grow, but not give the keys to the kingdom before folk prove they know how to unlock the door.

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Candidate: Sue Haynie (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? The Board of Education's (BOE) first priority should be in supporting Superintendent Rivera's strategic plan and vision which will be developed with the input of students, parents, staff, community stakeholders and the BOE. For years, Norwalk schools have worked under the labels of a 'district in need of improvement', a 'priority district' and an 'alliance district'—all code words for below- average achievement. With a plan and vision for excellence, Norwalk has a chance to break out of this cycle and become a high performing district.
A second priority of the BOE should be to review the three-year budget projection, which is nearing completion, and align that budget with the strategic plan. The alignment will tell us where we are financially, where we want to go, and where the gaps are. Having a three year budget will give us the time to figure out how we can best stay true to the strategic plan and also stay within budget—this may require finding alternate sources of funding; this may require reallocating resources; this may require doing things differently.
A third priority should be a rigorous implementation of the Common Core State Standards with a strong, embedded professional development component to ensure fidelity of implementation. We also need timely and consistent data review.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? I am a product of public schools, having attended them in 3 states and 7 cities. All my children are products of Norwalk schools. I believe in the spirit and mission of public education as the great equalizer.
Being a parent of two dyslexic children was a learning experience. I became adept at the special education process under IDEA with its byzantine rules. I learned that I 'didn't know what I didn't know' and that I needed to stay informed and persevere. My children are now excellent readers but ultimately, to achieve success, I had to get the services they needed outside of the public schools, using my own funding.
The experience also forced me to see the effects of reading failure up close. For quite some time, I was made to envision what a future might hold for someone who hadn't learned to read. Whether because of dyslexia, socio-economics or ethnicity, it is a sobering and frightful vision. It made me research the hows and whys of reading instruction. It also made me question the efficacy of special education for children with reading disabilities—a question that could just as easily be asked in Darien or Danbury. Dyslexia has been studied as much as heart disease and is the highest incident disability in special education. Our governor is dyslexic. It shouldn't have taken so long and been so hard.
Professionally, I owned and operated full-service restaurants prior to having school age children and now work in construction.

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3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. I appreciate data and review it at every opportunity. It informs my decision making. I am interested in early literacy and the effects of reading failure. Positive Behavior Intervention Specialists (PBIS) at the middle and high schools were hired two years ago to address high suspension rates. I asked if reading levels of the students served by PBIS staff could be tracked. The data collected showed that 70% of these students were reading 'at basic' or 'below basic'--failing. Reading failure and behavior are inextricably linked; we need to break that link, especially since research has shown that 95% of ALL students can learn to read.
I am a participating member of Norwalk ACTS (NACTS). Its new STRIVE framework builds a cradle to career civic infrastructure. The STRIVE scorecard will be used as a tool to communicate to the general public. The scorecard includes six youth-focused, community level outcomes where data will be tracked and used to identify success.
I subscribe to at least 7 online education websites that provide information about up-to-date education policies and trends locally, statewide, nationally and internationally. Keeping abreast of educational initiatives provides depth and breathe to the job that I do as a BOE member.
As chairwoman of the BOE Negotiations Committee, I use data to support contractual changes that add benefit for students.

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? I support charter schools and parental choice. I remain hopeful that South Norwalk Collegiate Academy will get the authorization it seeks from the State. If you don't give parents choice within your town borders, they will take it by voting with their feet. For those who say choice threatens traditional public education, I disagree. Competition defines the 21st century, forcing changes that will make traditional public schools stronger.
I support public-private partnerships. These partnerships allow districts to 'pilot' programs on a small scale for reproduction in a larger population. They are designed to be tracked, measured and results oriented and can offer opportunities that go beyond the reach of local funding, they allow taxpayer dollars to go farther. Norwalk schools already benefit from several partnerships. Norwalk ACTS with its soon-to-be-released scorecard/STRIVE initiative is designed to support Norwalk's youth in part by using partnerships such as this. I support vouchers for Special Education (SPED). Disabilities are blind to social, economic and ethnic boundaries. SPED parents are the only parents in a district with due process rights—that means they can sue if they are in disagreement with district- provided services. With vouchers, parents have a choice to stay in district, keeping their due process rights, or they can choose private placement that fits their child's needs. In states that have SPED vouchers, the dollar value of the voucher is usually based on a sliding scale related to the type of disability. This provides a defined cost to parents, districts and taxpayers.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? Increasing the availability of, scope of, and ease of access to timely and full information regarding our district and our schools is one way to improve the connections and foster collaborative relationships with all stakeholder groups. Information is power. When information is shared, it is empowering and can build trust. It is much easier to have constructive dialogs and interactions with people when everyone has equal access to the same information.
I was one of the original members of the Norwalk special education Parent Advisory Council, developed specifically to increase collaboration and the free flow of information to parents and staff.
I would like to see more ways in which students, staff, parents and community can talk, interact and exchange ideas, and would be supportive of any initiative which promoted that.
I would like to see a non-voting student representative(s) on the BOE to give voice to those we serve.

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Candidate: Sue Haynie (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? Comprehensive early literacy initiatives have been and remain something for which I am a steadfast advocate. Reading is foundational and it impacts almost everything a child does while at school—math, science, social studies, writing, and note taking to name a few. When a child can't read at grade level, it not only significantly decreases their long-term academic potential it also erodes their confidence and self-esteem. And, as noted in Question #3 above, it can have a direct and negative influence on a child's behavior—Connecticut and other states use 3rd grade reading scores to project the number of prison cells to build. And, a child who isn't reading at grade level by the end of 1st grade has only a 1 in 8 chance of ever catching up. Initiatives that improve early literacy outcomes that I have advocated for are: access to high quality preK programs; a rigorous K-5 language arts curriculum; embedded high quality professional development in early literacy instruction; training for the Connecticut Foundations of Reading test; timely, frequent and informative early reading assessments and timely and targeted reading interventions.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? The long-term strategic plan aligned with a 3-year budget projection, as noted above, will give us a road map that will allow us to greatly improve achievement for all students while staying within budget, doing so in a deliberate and informed manner.

It is not always just more money that is needed; we also have to think about how we use our funding. Are we spending our taxpayer dollars in the most effective and efficient manner? Can we trace student achievement gains directly to the use of those funding dollars?

During the 2010/11 school year, Norwalk spent on average $3,115/per student on staff benefit costs, the 2nd highest rate in Fairfield County. However, Norwalk spent only $134/per student on instructional supplies, the lowest amount in Fairfield County. As Bill Gates noted, over the last four decades, the per-student cost of running K-12 schools has more than doubled, while our student achievement has remained relatively flat. This is just as true in Norwalk as nationally; it is academically unacceptable for our students and their parents and it is financially unsustainable.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? I have been interested to see the amount of attention being paid, by parents and the community at large, to Norwalk public schools and public education in general. Typically, Board of Education elections go under-noticed. I am glad to see an interest and an excitement about education. There is hopefulness. Norwalk schools impact the lives of about 11,000 students and their parents, about 1,600 staff members, and are funded almost entirely by local taxpayer dollars. It's not an exaggeration to say that local schools are the pride of their community. They effect real estate values and residential desirability in addition to commanding roughly 65% of the city's budget. And, America's future rests on the efforts and the results of Boards of Education in the other 14,000 public school districts like Norwalk across the United States. I am glad to see the interest in this election.

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Candidate: Artie Kassimis (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? My priorities will be to continue to work with our Superintendent to raise the bar for our schools and ensure that every student receives an equitable education.
Continue to implement the recommendations of our financial audit to ensure that the Norwalk School system remains fiscally sound. These recommendations will enable us to properly align our budget with the goals of our School system.
Work closely with our city's Police and Fire Departments and ensure that all security measures are being followed

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? First and foremost, I am a proud parent of 4 children; two sons that have already been educated by our schools and two daughters that are currently enrolled in our schools. I have a continued vested interest in our schools.
I have been very involved in the community for years. For example, I have been a youth coach in Norwalk for over 15 years working with many of our kids and parents. I have also run clothing drives, food pantries, and other outreach events that have benefitted the citizens of Norwalk.
I have a unique background of corporate experience and community service that gives me a different perspective on how to lead and serve as a Board member. As a business professional, I see the BOE's role to effectively manage the business aspect of the organization which includes budgeting, hiring, supporting our CEO (Superintendent), etc…
The flip side is the nonprofit structure of Norwalk Schools. As a Pastor of a local church, I am the head of a nonprofit organization and understand all the nuances that go along with it and easily relating that to the school system.
Since joining the Board of Ed 2 1/2 years ago there are many things that I have accomplished. I worked closely with our Athletics department to create unique funding opportunities that preserved sports programs. I also introduced a driver's Ed program in our high schools that many of our students have participated in.
As a member of the Policy Committee, I have

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. One of my business mentors, from years ago, said to me "If you don't measure, you can't manage." In other words, having very specific data about your business is extremely crucial in helping you manage your business. I have been certified in an IT industry standard called ITIL. ITIL is based on creating processes, procedures, tasks, baseline measurements and checklists that include all related data so that an organization can properly manage their IT business.
As the head of the Sales IT department, I provided support to over 1200 users in the US and the South American office. We handled over 5000 help desk calls per month. Understanding the nature of the calls was crucial in determining a better solution for the organization. Using the database we created to monitor help desk calls; we were able to pinpoint recurrent problems and provide proactive solutions to the users and reduce downtime.
When I initially joined the board, I was tasked with analyzing the district's IT department. The first place I turned to was the help desk database to review the data.
The tracking of data is vitally important in the decision making process to improve the level of service we provide our students, our taxpayers, and our staff as well as improving our overall operation.

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? The public-private partnerships here in Norwalk seem to be working very well. We have many private funders that help Norwalk Schools pick up the slack from any budget shortfalls. There are many private foundations that are firmly invested in Norwalk's future.
Charter Schools do have their place in our society and as we all know there is one here in Norwalk that is doing well.

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Candidate: Artie Kassimis (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? I have always been one who gets along well with people. I spend much of my time out in the community as part of my Pastoral duties, working well with other churches and agencies in the area. When the discussion of a civility code came up, I had no issue with it and gladly signed it.
Civility should be a mandatory character trait for all Board members, since we are all adults and need to set the proper example for our students and staff.

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? There are many factors that will help increase a child's ability to learn, for example – involved parents, good teachers, and proper nutrition. I believe we need to do a better job of going out into the community and talking with the public to present what Norwalk schools have to offer; one of those being free and reduced lunch. There are members of the community that shy away from government buildings or don't have the means of transportation to get to city hall and sign up. We also have a language barrier that may add to those that don't sign up.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? We are nearing the completion of the Board's first ever three-year budget process, which should allow a long-term approach to budgeting and allow for alignment of the budget with the educational goals of the system. This will take us away from the constant state of panic the Board has found itself in over the past years and will also help us raise the bar and provide the necessary resources our Superintendent needs to lead with greater confidence.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? What has concerned me the most, over the years, is how poorly our financial systems were being managed. Over the past two years we have worked very diligently to hire the right people and implement corrective measures to successfully bring our financial house in order. The result has been a $1.6M surplus this past fiscal year.

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Candidate: Heidi Keyes (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? In light of my early childhood education background my priorities will be to continue to invest and support our early childhood initiatives. I will continue to advocate and stress the importance that all children be exposed to an early learning environment. I have first-hand knowledge of the importance of an Early Childhood Education since I operated my own preschool for 6 years in Silvermine and have a degree in Early Childhood education.
Secondly, it is imperative to have good communication between board members, central office and the community. The community must be able to trust that communication between all stakeholders is open and transparent. I am committed to continuing to work on getting more members of the community to our Board of Education meetings and getting our web-site updated so that it is more user-friendly and accessible. In addition, I support the need for our meetings to be videotaped.
Thirdly, we have a new superintendent, Dr. Manny Rivera and I want to help him succeed to lead our district and move forward with making Norwalk Public Schools a superior public education system. We have already approved a plan for a significant reorganization and revitalizing of central office. I think as part of this support for Dr. Rivera we need to implement continuing phases of the Common Core curriculum and focus on narrowing the achievement gap so that all our children can move on to higher education.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? I bring a unique perspective since I have lived in Norwalk my entire life and have attended Norwalk Schools. I have 3 children in the Norwalk school system at all levels: elementary, middle and high school. I am qualified for this position since I have 4 years experience as a Board of Education member and 1 year in an Executive position as Secretary. In addition, I am a strong advocate for early childhood education since I operated my own preschool program for six years in Silvermine. I also have my degree in Early Childhood Education. I am currently an educational assistant for the New Canaan Public Schools. I have a background as a parent advocate and facilitator for the Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence. Prior to that I worked for more than 15 years in corporate travel industry in varies staff and managerial positions.

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. Having been on the board for the last 4 years using data to make decisions is imperative. The key is understanding the data and knowing the source of the data. Is it accurate? Does it apply to the issues in question before the board? Often I find data can be manipulated to fit into a position for a particular side on an issue. Recently the board had to make decisions relative to the transition to Common Core standards on curriculum and materials for K-12 mathematics and grades 6-12 English language arts programs. We were presented with a lot of data about which curriculum works best. Again, you have to look at the data, who is presenting it and how well do you think it will fit the needs of the district. If the goal is to raise the bar and create uniformity for what is being taught then deciding on the choice of curriculum is critically important. In addition, we are constantly working on ways to close the achievement gap for students. It is important to look at trends and see where we are improving and where we need to make improvements. For example if you look at the math, reading and writing results for 4th grade the district average is at Goal. However, we can do better and our goal should be to always continue to improve.

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Candidate: Heidi Keyes (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? I am in favor of charter schools. In fact, we have a great charter school in Norwalk, Side by Side that is very successful and has a strong connection to the community. We must build on the public-private partnerships within our community. Undoubtedly costs are skyrocketing and there is pressure to fund programs and pay teachers and staff that will enable our school system to not only improve, but flourish. It has to be a priority to grow and enhance existing partnerships with Norwalk Community College, the business community and other community groups to expand opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Partnerships can also enhance grants and financial streams that can help fill in gaps with our school budget. Dr. Rivera has the creativity and vision to build upon these partnerships and that is why I strongly support in these efforts. In addition, our school board must be a driving force behind these efforts while continually finding innovative ways to not only improve our district but make it a shining example to others.
I am generally not in favor of school vouchers. I don't believe in mixing public monies for private education. I don't see it as a particular issue with our district.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? Frankly, it is imperative to have good communication between board members, central office and the community. The community must be able to trust that communication between all stakeholders is open and transparent. Norwalk Public Schools has a large district that must have a strong central office to support this. I am committed to continuing to work on getting more members of the community to our Board of Education meetings. I have also voiced my concern to have our meetings once again televised so that the community can view our meetings if they are unable to attend. In addition, I pride myself on being a very reasonable person that listens to all sides of an issue. As a board member for the last 4 years, when parents, students, teachers or other board members have something to say about an issue I want to know what they think and why. I have a vested interest not only as a board member, but as a parent and taxpayer in Norwalk. Further, I think that to build collaborative relationships you have to earn respect and give respect to others while working with other members of the board and the community regardless of party affiliation or special interest. I do not believe in a bully mentality in order to get your way nor will I stand for it from others.

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? We need to promote a learning environment that is challenging for all students and most importantly, creates a learning environment that fosters excellence and inclusiveness. Our district is unique in so many ways but we have problems that universally affect our nation as a whole. How do we engage our young people to have a passion for learning? We need to create a vision and structure for them where they see themselves as successful. I would advocate for a partnership that reaches out to parents that will engage them to be part of their child's education. Schools are a crucial part of the community. The school day should not end when the school bell sounds but rather we need to encourage all parents to have their children participate in activities outside of the school day. There are so many activities in our school system including music programs, sports, student government, theatrical productions, art, intramurals or student groups. A socially engaged student is one with higher self esteem and more focus that will perform better academically. This can be achieved through our PTO's, guidance offices and administration to reach out to parents in community centers and religious institutions. For example, when I see kids participating in the middle school or high school Marching Bands or the Columbus Magnet Young Astronaut program, I see them disciplined and ready to tackle challenges. These programs may be outside the classroom but they are teaching students to think critically and work together.

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Candidate: Heidi Keyes (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? I think that we need to continue to support the district's excellent programs including Academically and Artistically Talented for gifted students along with the Center for Global Studies and Honors and A.P. courses. Teachers are using innovative techniques and technologies to teach our students. It does take funds to raise the rigor and innovation of our curriculum but I believe money is well spent in the classroom for students and professional development training for our teachers. Our teachers should have the training they need to stay current on new methods and technologies in the classroom. I am a firm believer that we need to raise the bar but also establish a budget that is fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of Norwalk while allowing the district to secure high academic standards.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? Well, I have been on the board for 4 years now and I've learned so much about the district during that time. Our school budget is such a big concern to me. Like most people in this City I know that we must spend our tax dollars wisely but balance that with the needs of the students, teachers and staff to run a school system that must improve in all areas. It also concerns me that the public perception for families living in Norwalk or those considering to move to Norwalk is that our public school system is second rate. That is simply not the case. Our City is dynamic and diverse. Our City should celebrate that diversity and our school system should showcase the wonderful things that our students and teachers are doing. We have students going on to Ivy League schools and other great colleges. We have students at Briggs High School that have turned their lives around and are moving on to higher education. We have teachers that are doing incredible things in the classroom and changing the lives of students. Yes of course we need to bring up overall student performance but with Dr. Rivera and our transition to Common Core standards a plan is being established for long-term solutions to meeting the needs of students.

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Candidate: Shirley Mosby (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them?

Improving Student Achievement

The improvement of student achievement is one of the most important challenges facing the Board of Education. I will work with the Board of Education members and the Superintendent to implement the most appropriate polices to improve student achievement. As the BOE, we must support staff to narrow the achievement gap and ensure that all students receive the appropriate instruction that will provide the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. In addition, we must implement the state mandated Common Core curriculum and provide student materials and staff development to our teachers.

Parental and Community Involvement

We must increase the ways and frequency in which we communicate with parents and the community. Parents and the community must be informed about student performance, the needs of the school district to meet the federal and state curriculum standards, and ways in which they can support the district's improvement goals.

Communication and Safety

We must increase communication with the stakeholders (parents, students, staff, and community). I will work with the Board of Education to establish policies to enhance communication with our community, parents, and staff. I will be available to all, and I will listen.

After the recent tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown Connecticut, I will be diligent about the safety of our students and staff, not just from possible outside intruders but the safety of students in the classrooms and schools. We have to make certain that we have established safety and parent notification protocols.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? As a former board member, I have a vested interest in our schools. I have not lost my interest or passion in serving the Norwalk community and its children. It was my intention then, as it is now, to be certain that all students will benefit from a quality education. I believe strongly that all children have the ability to learn.

I am a lifelong Norwalk resident and a proven community leader who attended Norwalk Public Schools. My son attended Norwalk Public Schools and graduated from Quinnipiac University with a degree in business. I have actively advocated for parents and encouraged parents to take an active lead in their children's education. My vision for Norwalk is to provide quality education for all children, regardless of socio-economic status or disability. I believe in open communication and accountability.

My collaborative, bipartisan, and open inclusive style has allowed me to resolve difficult situations. My passion for children, parental involvement, and community engagement gives me a unique insight into a diverse community. I will represent all students and families. I understand the needs of learners who are advanced and those who are in need of academic support.

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. Having been a former BOE member, I have a solid understanding of how to interpret achievement data, student attendance trends, school climate surveys, discipline data, budget reports, and state reporting data, as examples. I know how to utilize data to make informed decisions and to suggest recommendations. Many data presentations are made to BOE members, and I understand the importance of reading the reports prior to the meeting in order to be prepared to ask questions. I am familiar with how to utilize on-line services for further research on my own. I also know that BOE members work together to use data as budgets and programs are established.

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Candidate: Shirley Mosby (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? I support schools and programs that demonstrate using data that all children are learning. With that being said, I want to focus on Norwalk Public Schools, because I truly believe that with the proper resources, policies, and curriculum, we can continue to create great results in our schools.
I have reservations about education tax dollars being diverted from public schools in order to subsidize the tuition of private and religious school students. Programs such as Title I and Special Education are consistently under-funded. Federal education funds are limited and should be invested in public schools not diverted to private and other schools that have not shown positive academic results. I have concerns about voucher programs since the effect of vouchers will create a separation of wealthy and poor students. As an example, a wealthy family would be able to easily pay the tuition difference to send their child to school in an affluent setting. A poor family would be unable to do so.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? As a BOE member, I will not establish divisions. It is not the BOE against the staff, BOE members against one another, or the BOE and the city in unrest situations. While we may not always agree, we must disagree in an agreeable manner and work to resolve matters. I will continue to actively seek input from our community constituents. I will be a visible and approachable BOE member. I will work with the BOE to develop parent engagement strategies. I will embrace ideas, suggestions, collaborate and listen. I will attend events and be as visible as possible to the community.

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? Many schools have a free lunch percentage of 50% or higher with some elementary schools being eligible for federal Title 1 funds. Some learners need intensive service even if they are not eligible for free or reduced lunch. I believe in-school and after-school support services, summer enrichment programs, and working with community organizations and state funders to develop and enhance academic supports.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? It is important that our community members are aware of the needs of our students and the district's requirements as determined by federal and state standards to effectively educate all students. The BOE must establish a process to regularly help our community recognize that strong schools mean strong property values. The district conducts a subject curriculum review and on a specific yearly cycle. During the subject review, decisions can be made to discontinue programs that are no longer effective or may be outdated. Our taxpayers in Norwalk value our children but want to see positive academic results.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? We need to re-establish positive working relationships with our staff, parents and community. We need to create working relationships and not divisions. We need to continue to seek additional state and federal funding to support our budget. We must provide an appropriate budget with declining resources. We need more pre-school programs and student enrichment programs. We are embarking on the implementation of the Common Core Standards in the classroom. We must purchase the most appropriate materials and provide staff development. Our buildings must be wireless and the appropriate technology must be purchased in order that students can take the new state assessments using computers and not pencil and paper. Our parents and community must be more fully engaged so that our students can be successful.

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Candidate: Andres Roman (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? The first priority would be to close the achievement gap. There must be a reading program implemented that reaches all of our children. We cannot hold the children hostage because of political incongruity. I would request that my fellow elected members discuss and implement a language arts program based upon its ability to serve the needs of the Elementary school students. The decision should not be based on political interests of adopting Core Knowledge, which was judged to only meet 42% of the educational criteria. I will push to adopt the recommendation of the professionals and will work with the superintendent to free the process from further political influence.

One of the struggles for years has been the budget. I will question any irregularities or vague requests. A budget should not be a bargaining chip, be based upon any hidden agenda, or be voted on without discussion. Members of the Board (with the lone dissenting vote of my running mate) voted for the 2012-2013 budget, with minimal discussion and no meaningful debate; yet it was a budget that hurt our elementary school students and other at-risk populations. My running mate, Steve Colarossi created a student-centered budget that was revenue neutral for the taxpayers. The plan would have saved vital professionals, which would have reduced the impact on our students' learning.

Finally, the Board of Education should be transparent in all of its business. It will be my duty and responsibility to inform my constituents. I will respond to their questions.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? On a personal level, I will be an effective member because I am a dad of two students in our schools, a graduate of Brien McMahon, and a taxpayer. I was born and raised in South Norwalk and understand the challenges that many students face being raised in a single parent home under the poverty line. I am a coach for Cal Ripken Baseball, NAA Flag Football, and a member of the Marvin PTO.

I will treat each decision as a board member with the same care and attention, I would expect of anyone making decisions that will have a profound impact on my sons. There must be a sense that every child deserves the best possible education and every taxpayer deserves to know the money allocated is being utilized appropriately. The Board of Education must strive to do more without further burdening the taxpayers.

On a professional level, I obtained a Bachelor with a certification to teacher. I've worked as a substitute teacher, so I have a sense of the needs we face in our schools. I have a Master in Counseling, where I have acquired peer mediation and conflict resolution skills. These skills have made me an effective listener and communicator. I also was employed for a Family Violence Program in Norwalk, assisting families during challenging and struggling times and providing guidance on how to reconnect and control behaviors. As a Probation Officer, I have the fortune to guide my clients to be responsible, correct past mistakes and

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. Data is important if used correctly. I use data on a daily basis in my career. I review the data to assist the risk level of my clients and devise a plan that will help each client reduce recidivism. The data provides me with the clients' story and where the clients are struggling or at risk. If the data reflects that the client is at high risk for substance abuse, my decision would be to encourage the client to attend a substance abuse program. Once the substance abuse program is completed, the data is reviewed to guide the client in addressing his (or her) next high risk need. At each level, I review the data available to me, and interpret the data in light of what I know to be the risks and challenges which the client faces.

As a Board of Education member, I would use data to make the imperative decision to implement an Elementary Literacy Program. Educators assessed the Pearsons program and found it met 98% of our students' needs. Yet, literacy program has not been implemented and the students are suffering. We must also review the data that the state mandates be collected regarding bullying and use that data to improve how we identify and prevent bullying behaviors.

League of Women Voters of Norwalk 2013 Voter Guide

Candidate: Andres Roman (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public—private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? I believe that parents have the right to form a charter school if they so chose. Side by Side has a strong bond with the community. I would not prevent or oppose any group that would show interest in charter schools. I would not be against public-private partnerships if it would enrich the students' ability and knowledge. In most voucher programs that I have reviewed, public schools are still required to comply with far more state and federal regulations than private schools do, as a result; I am not in favor of vouchers since they would reduce the funding for public schools without reducing the costs of the many federal and state regulations imposed on public schools.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility, how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? I would foster collaborative relationship with the staff, parents, community, and fellow board members by being transparent. I would respond to each e-mail, phone call, letter, and question. I have nothing to hide and would like the community of Norwalk to understand that I am here for them. I would encourage parents and staff to attend the Board of Education meetings to voice their ideas, likes, and displeasures. You cannot be heard unless you make yourself noticed, yet in speaking with many parents, there is not a widespread belief that their opinions are welcomed or heard. I would work to change that perception.

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? Norwalk's students need help in achieving literacy and fluency. That is why it is imperative that a comprehensive English Language Arts program is implemented that will serve the needs of all learners from Kindergarten to grade 5, and that will allow these students a seamless transition to middle school and high school. It is important for all schools to utilize the same system so that students are not disadvantaged struggling to learn a new language arts program. This would also assist the educators because they would not have to spend time to reassess the student, which would mean more time for classroom teaching.

Studies have shown that students with early childhood education are at a higher probability to succeed and be more academically sound then their fellow student with no pre-school experience. Providing greater access to pre-school programs would close the achievement gap and I support efforts to expand pre-school programs in our schools.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of Norwalk's taxpayers? Many are skeptical that a district can have a reasonable balance between quality programs and a budget that is fair to taxpayers. I believe that Norwalk can and must find this balance. The first order of business is agreeing on a sensible budget, which requires that student needs be fully reviewed. This was the process that should have been followed with the 2012-2013 budget, but was not. The end result was a budget that was grossly unfair to students. The turmoil this budget process created caused many families to question our school system. A city which questions the ability of its public schools will undoubtedly see a negative impact on property values.

I will be accountable for my decision and ensure that the people of Norwalk and the students are at the forefront. I will undertake and advocate for a comprehensive budget review process that would utilize objective evaluations of our educational programs, data-driven analysis, and extensive input from the public. Budget decisions cannot be made for the political gains of elected officials.

There must be a willingness to consider alternative plans and an openness to question past practices and assumptions. The Board of Education must evaluate the money it spends forcing employee contracts into mediation and arbitration is not beneficial to our students, families and taxpayers. Observing the regular need to fund more attorney fees due to negotiation strategies made me realize that taxpayer's money is being wasted. This money belongs in our classrooms not lawyers' offices.

League of Women Voters of Norwalk 2013 Voter Guide

Candidate: Andres Roman (Norwalk Community Values) Office: Board of Education At-Large

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? Political needs have influenced far too many decisions, which have negatively impacted our students from the delays in the overdue revised English Language Arts program to the 2012-2013 budget. Student needs have taken a back seat to politics. That is a prime reason why I have been willing to do the extra work to run on a new party line and to not seek a major party nomination. The Board of Education members should not have a political agenda. The board should consist of a team of citizens all concerned with finding the appropriate balance between the needs of our students and our taxpayers. The team should understand that negative decisions will impact the lives of many and the future of Norwalk.

Serving on the Board of Education means keeping an open mind to the needs of the entire community. It means having a fundamental belief that every student must be treated with dignity and respect and that all must be provided the education that will best meet their needs. For me, I am thankful every day for the teachers and coaches who took an interest in helping me to achieve my potential and improve my life. I hope that members of the Board of Education to be elected in November will appreciate that they have a similarly important role in helping all of our youth. Our children need a beacon of light and direction, but if there is continuous political involvement that beacon will never be seen.

League of Women Voters of Norwalk 2013 Voter Guide

Candidate: Lauren Rosato (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them?

If elected, I believe the BOE's top three priorities should be:

1. To support the new superintendent and district leadership to succeed in delivering an excellent public education system, including the transition to Common Core;
2. To maintain fiscal stewardship in the budgeting process while balancing the financial needs of the Norwalk taxpayer with the educational needs of our children;
3. To improve communication systems and processes with key focus areas on school safety and parent engagement.

I would like to see the implementation of an improved budgeting process that produces budget clarity. I would like to see the budgeting process driven by a long-term funding focus on educational outcomes and goals, versus a yearly funding focus by school building. I would like the budgeting process to begin and end earlier, include all stakeholder input, take into consideration the financial stress placed on the Norwalk taxpayer while balancing the educational needs of children, and document the actual cost of the classroom versus all other costs.

If elected I think literacy must be addressed if we are serious about closing the achievement gap including targeted teacher professional development for improved reading outcomes at all grade levels and especially in early grades.

I think safety and communication need to be addressed, and that they go hand in hand. With better communication systems and processes, we will improve the safety of our schools.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member? From a professional level, I have many qualifications from corporate, nonprofit, international, and entrepreneurial experiences that include:

- Established relationships from my tenure as NEF president and PTOC secretary with school staff, parents, students, community organizations, private funders, current BOE members, union leadership, city leadership, and state leadership;
- Experience in budgeting and fiscal stewardship from running two nonprofits and running my own international company for 13 years;
- Experience in raising private funds from running two nonprofits, and in my current role as a nonprofit development consultant;
- Experience as a trained debate moderator and community conversation facilitator, most recently facilitating dialogue for Bridgeport Public School teachers. This skill is extremely valuable in getting people to work collaboratively while maintaining civility;
- Experience in strategic planning.

From a personal level, I have two daughters, a sophomore at Norwalk High School and a recent Norwalk High School graduate. Both also attended Silvermine Elementary School and West Rocks Middle School.

I am an active member of St. Joseph's Church in South Norwalk, where I volunteer as an assistant ESL teacher in a class offered by Side by Side Charter School.

I grew up in a family of educators and greatly value public education. My mother and her sister are retired public school teachers. My father is a retired IT professional who taught at Quinnipiac University. I am a product of public schools.

I also possess a cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity from serving the poor and disabled throughout the world.

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Candidate: Lauren Rosato (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. It's extremely important that school board members understand data and use it in decision-making. An example of how I would use data to inform and guide my decision-making would be in budgeting.

As a BOE member, I would take district data by grade, by subject, by subgroup, by outcome, and use it to inform my budgeting decisions for targeted resource allocation. I would analyze the 45% of 3rd graders who do not read at goal. Where are they, which classrooms? Where have they been? How are resources currently being allocated to these 360 or so children that are the "achievement gap"? Is there a better way to allocate resources, especially if our resources are finite?

What data is available about K-3 reading that tells if the achievement gap is closing more rapidly in some classrooms than others? What is being done in those classrooms and how do you replicate that to make it happen in all classrooms?

Along this same vein – how can we effectively accelerate special education, middle and high achieving students to their fullest potential? Where is the highest acceleration seen? The lowest? How are resources being budgeted accordingly to advance all students to their highest potential? And then repeat this data analysis for all subject areas.

I am already reading public education data reports from other districts and states, and international education data reports. I have been doing this for many years.

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public-private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? Charter, magnets and vouchers offer school choice, foster competition, and competition raises the bar. In Norwalk, we see buses from all neighborhoods going to AITE, Side by Side and Columbus. Likewise, we see non-Norwalk students attending Global Studies. I think there should be more choices for parents and students: themed schools for the arts and music, STEM schools, language academies, career schools for finance, the trades, entrepreneurship, first-responder/civil service, health, agriculture, etc.

I ran the Norwalk Education Foundation for 6 years and focused solely on public-private partnerships. It's a big part of the answer on how to fully fund the BOE budget without breaking the taxpayer's back. I am in favor of it.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community, and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? We need to have several avenues of communication to foster collaborative relationships. I am greatly heartened by Dr. Rivera's focus on a communication position and updating the district's website for a functioning parent portal.

Information needs to be readily accessible. In my experience at central office, information was purposely withheld or made extremely difficult to obtain. I mentioned in another set of candidate questions a strategy for unfunded mandates: wait long enough and it will go away. This same strategy is used for information: withhold information long enough and the questions will go away.

Only Special Ed parents have recourse. Others get frustrated and change school districts if they can. It's also a major reason why our schools are known as fiefdoms (see CREC and Cambridge reports), and the school culture is unhealthy and lacks trust.

Allowing information to be readily available will be a major priority of mine. The free flow of information will break down these fiefdoms, change the school culture, foster collaborative relationships, improve civility, and bring back trust. With this election, we have a chance to change the culture of Norwalk Schools. It's why I view this election as a turning point for the district.

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Candidate: Lauren Rosato (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? As president of NEF, I concentrated on 2 major focus areas: teacher quality and out-of-school time learning. The out-of-school focus was to build an infrastructure for a district-wide before and after school K-8 program that would be affordable, accessible and high quality through the pooling of district and community resources. The same concept can be applied to high school as well.

The reason is to level the playing field for all of Norwalk's children but especially for Free/Reduced lunch children, and for children whose family income falls just above the F/R income threshold. These families don't qualify for F/R lunch but often can't afford extracurricular activities or quality extended learning programs for their children. Yet so many of our children need more than 6-hours per day / 180 days of school to succeed.

If elected, I would work to engage the community and Norwalk Acts in helping to deliver a year-round, engaging learning environment that extends both the learning day that so many children need, and reduces the summer learning loss that so many children experience.

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Candidate: Lauren Rosato (R) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of the Norwalk taxpayer. This question addresses one of my top 3 priorities: to maintain fiscal stewardship in the budgeting process while balancing the financial needs of the Norwalk taxpayer with the educational needs of our children. I would start by truly understanding the cost of academic standards versus everything else.

How is $14,979 per student spent in Norwalk Schools?	Per Student Allocation
100 Security	$8
800 Professional Dues, Associations	$9
100 Extra- Curricular Stipends	$11
700 Instructional Equipment & Software	$28
100 Overtime	$34
100 Degree Changes	$34
100 Common Core Implementation, Salaries Workshops	$42
100 Superintendent's Office & Super Admin Team	$80
100 Other Non- Certified (Security Staff, Monitors, Testing Coordinators, Mailroom Personnel)	$82
100 Supervisors & Asst. Supervisors (Instructional Specialists, Special Education Support, Expulsion Hearings)	$100
100 Nurses & Physical Therapists	$127
100 Non Affiliated Staff (IT, Audio Visual Techs, Payroll, Facilities Directors, Executive Support)	$127
100 All Substitutes	$155
400 Property Services (Building Equipment & Maintenance)	$237
300 Professional & Technical Services (Legal Fees, etc.)	$328
100 Custodians & Maintenance	$474
100 Principals & Asst. Principals & Housemasters	$493
600 Supplies (Oil, Electricity, Gasoline, Oil, Books, Postage, Other)	$625
100 Other Certified Staff (Social Workers, Psychologists, Speech Therapists, Guidance Counselors, Instructional Aides, HS Librarians)	$702
100 Secretaries, Aides & Clerks	$976
500 Other (Special Ed Tuition & Bus Transportation)	$1,204
200 Benefits (Health & Life Insurance, Social Security, Retirement, Longevity…)	$3,329
100 Classroom Teachers	$5,774
TOTAL	$14,979

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? I am heartened by the leadership shown by Dr. Rivera in just a few months: changes in central office, information technology director filled, interim positions being addressed, improved budgeting schedule, strategic plan in the works, and grant applications going out to new funders as well as Race to the Top.

I am concerned that the Norwalk community will not elect 4 BOE candidates that will help him succeed. I therefore ask the Norwalk community to really do their homework on the 10 BOE candidates before voting. This school system is 60% of your tax dollar, it directly impacts your property values, and it impacts your quality of life.

League of Women Voters of Norwalk 2013 Voter Guide

Candidate: Haroldo Williams (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

1. If you are elected, what should the Board of Education's top three priorities be and how would you implement them? If elected, the top three priorities for the B.O.E. should be to:

a. Establish clear & measurable Education Goals & Objectives
   - I would share with the B.O.E. that Board of Education of high performing schools systems have clear & measurable goals and objectives that are used to benchmark the performance of their school system; and I would recommend that we prioritize this initiative.

b. Develop and launch a community strategy for overcoming the achievement gap, while boosting the academic achievement of all students.
   - I would propose to the board to launch an initiative that would engage parents, teachers, community centers, religious institutions, and volunteers, to academically engage, and motivate students to achieve academic excellence

c. Establish standard business processes for use in proposing, evaluating, and launching educational and operations initiatives in the Norwalk Public Schools (such as the new Common Core curriculum, and the recently proposed technology initiative)
   - I will identify deficiencies and ineffectiveness in the loose process that is being used to propose, select, and implement the new initiatives. I will then compare this to how successful organizations use data, facts, analysis and process to make decisions and launch new business initiatives – such as Six Sigma, and Lean Manufacturing; and I will provide recommendations for how we could transition the B.O.E.

2. On a personal and professional level, what life experiences and qualifications have equipped you to become an effective Board of Education member?

d. On a personal level, I have had the following direct experience in Norwalk & NYC Public Schools:
   - Parent of two children who attended Cranbury, West Rocks, Norwalk High ('94 & '96 graduates)
     - Both were in the Academically Talented program and the National Honor Society
     - One was in the Artistically Talented program
   - Vice President, Norwalk PTO Council – two terms ('89-'91)
   - Norwalk Mentor with a student from 3rd - 11th grade
   - Math Tutor (1-year) -- Norwalk
   - Chaperone ('93-96) and Parent field volunteer ('92-'96) with the Norwalk Marching Bears
   - Husband of a compassionate and dedicated 3rd grade teacher, who is in her 23rd year teaching at Columbus Magnet School
   - Volunteer & Executive Sponsor of a NYC Exploring program, with NYC public schools students

e. On a professional level, I have a range of engineering, professional services and consulting experience
   - See professional background onLinkedIn: ***http://www.linkedin.com/pub/haroldo-williams/2/4bb/81***

f. My life experience, as highlighted below, has enabled me to be tolerant and accepting, and will add a broad perspective to the B.O.E.
   - Naturalized U.S. citizen (1978)
   - 30-year resident of Norwalk
   - Life-long immigrant, having lived 20-years in Panama as a 2nd generation immigrant from Jamaica
   - Lived in the Panama Canal Zone, which provided strong exposure to the U.S. culture
   - Lived in Texas and NY State before moving to CT
   - My wife and I are from different cultural backgrounds

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Candidate: Haroldo Williams (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

3. The Center for Public Education states that effective school boards are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data about their own student body and from outside research studies, even if the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. Please provide 2-3 examples of how you would use or have used data to inform and guide your decision-making. During my campaign for the B.O.E., I have used data to analyze the academic achievement of different sub-groups within the Norwalk student population, to provide greater clarity of the needs that any possible solution would need to address. Below are two examples:

a. I reviewed the state of CT CAPT test results, and performed an analysis to determine if there was a difference in academic achievement between Black Females and Black Males, and Hispanic Females and Hispanic Males. The results indicated that there was a difference. As a result, I would recommend that when developing a strategy to work on overcoming the achievement gap, we will need to ensure that the proposed initiatives will be flexible in dealing with different levels of achievement, to ensure that we are able to academically engage and motivate all participating students.

b. I also filtered the data to produce reports that compared the achievement of students who were eligible for "Free & Reduced Meals" and those who were not, within the same demographic groups. My assumption is that students who are eligible for "Free & Reduced Meals" would most likely have challenges gaining access to the resources required to ensure academic proficiency. As a result, I would recommend reviewing the opportunity to have community organizations provide supplemental after-school educational services in neighborhoods with greater concentration of students who are eligible for "Free & Reduced Meals."

4. What is your position on charter schools and other public-private partnerships in the school system? What is your position on school vouchers? I am opposed to school vouchers, and to the privatization of public services. However, I support charter schools; but I am opposed to charters schools operated by for-profit institutions. Nevertheless, I believe that Boards of Education should monitor the performance of local charter school(s) and hold the charter schools accountable to the mission and goals of their stated charter. In addition, I believe that the charter schools should be required to participate in bi-annual public forums, to share concepts and initiatives that produce positive results, and thereby provide the professional staff from the traditional schools with opportunities to identify practices that could be integrated into their curriculum.

My position on this issue has been consistent over the years. I was one of the parent advocates selected by the founders of the Norwalk Side-by-Side Charter School to speak at a Norwalk Board of Education meeting, in support of the proposal that the founders submitted for approval to establish the Side-by-Side School in Norwalk.

My opposition to vouchers is that I believe that if vouchers were available, the private schools could raise their rates, and would thereby become unaffordable to the economically disadvantaged students (with vouchers), while becoming a subsidy for those who were already attending private schools.

5. Beyond the Code of Civility how have you or would you connect and listen to staff, parents, community, and fellow board members in order to foster collaborative relationships? I would use my interpersonal skills, my ability to speak Spanish, and my multi-cultural experience to connect with the full cross-section of Norwalk residents, and with the staff, and Board members. I would also attend school functions, PTO meetings, and schedule community meetings in different neighborhood, as time permits.

I also plan to convince the board to adopt sound business and decision making process, which would enable the discussions to be based on facts, using data, analysis and information; and thereby avoiding personal opinions or ideology that often lead to divisiveness in organizations.

I firmly believe that I have the vision, perspective, and leadership skills that would ensure that the B.O.E. would work together and become highly effective in addressing the need to improve the educational achievement of all students, and provide a highly effective level of educational services to the residents of the City of Norwalk.

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Candidate: Haroldo Williams (D) ***Office: Board of Education At-Large***

6. What specific measures would you advocate for with respect to assisting Norwalk's 47% free and reduced lunch population, to ensure that our school system is meeting the needs of all children? My stated platform initiative -- to overcome the Achievement Gap -- is targeted to service this population, since there is an even a wider divide in the Achievement Gap within this demographic group of students. Therefore, I would advocate working with civic and religious organizations, community centers, and the Norwalk Housing Authority, to implement programs that would academically engage students within their neighborhoods, and ensure that these students gain access to the required educational resources.

I would also advocate engaging local and regional social services and non-profit organizations (such as the Norwalk Housing Authority, and/or the Bridgeport Rescue Mission) to explore the opportunities available for providing food services to these students over the weekend, holidays, and during the summer.

7. What would you do to ensure a reasonable balance between the need to maintain high academic standards through quality programs and the need to establish spending levels that address the concerns of the Norwalk taxpayer. I would recommend establishing an entity within the Norwalk Public Schools to pursue educational investment from local corporations, and federal, state, and private grants to help fund programs in the Norwalk public schools. I would also recommend establishing a coalition with the local state representative to develop a strategy to urge the State government to:

- Change the educational funding policy, to ensure that financial need is determined by a meaningful measure, such as the percentage of the student body that are eligible for "Free and Reduced Meals"
- Change the policy for funding services for special needs students, and have the state assume 100% of the cost.

I would also personally work with the Mayor's office, the City Council, and our state and national representatives to voice the need for a change in the educational funding policies. I have reviewed the discrepancy in the funding, and I am surprised at the large discrepancy, whereby districts of comparable size as Norwalk, with a significantly smaller percentage of students qualifying for "Free and Reduced Meals" receive even 300% more education funds per student than Norwalk. If there was equity in the state educational funding, there would be a significant difference on the property tax burden in the City of Norwalk.

8. As you have prepared for the election campaign, what information did you learn about Norwalk Public Schools that interests and/or concerns you the most? My objective for becoming a candidate was to create a sense of urgency, focus and commitment on the B.O.E. to work towards overcoming the achievement gap, and to significantly boost the academic achievement of all students. This remains my primary concern.

However, on the campaign trail, I have heard parents and teachers express concerns regarding how Norwalk is under-serving the students with learning disabilities and special needs. This has become an issue of great concern to me.

As a result, I did some research, and I learned that local municipalities must contribute 4.5 times the district's average per pupil expense to a student's special education cost before the state contributes.

Nevertheless, hearing from so many about this issue, if elected, I would ask the B.O.E. to have the Superintendent perform an assessment of how Norwalk is servicing the needs of the students with learning disabilities and special needs, and recommend measures that would ensure that Norwalk is providing a highly effective level of educational services to these students. I would also recommend that we seek grants and private funding to help the city finance the level of service required to service the students with special needs and learning disabilities, while urging our state legislators to pass a law to have the state fully fund the cost of special education.