

New Rochelle Federation of United School Employees

BOE Candidate Questionnaire

Responses Submitted to FUSE by Robert Cox (May 13, 2021)

I want to thank FUSE for this opportunity to respond to your questions.

Let me first say, my colleagues on the ballot and I agree that areas of focus for the school board must include providing a safe learning environment, healthy work environment for our teachers and staff, providing support for our most vulnerable students and investing in technology.

I am the only candidate who has spent the last five years working directly with FUSE leadership and FUSE members on state-mandated committees with statutory authority to develop and deliver school security plans to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and staff, to complete the \$106.5mm bond construction to provide equity through infrastructure, to develop facilities specifications for identifying a new forever home for the Campus School and to develop smartphone app technology which allows the entire school community to engage in maintaining our investment in our schools.

You can learn more about me at robertcox.substack.com. As a bonus, there is a cute photo of Zeke, the English Bull Terrier, on my substack article.

1. What are your priorities for the City School District of New Rochelle in the coming year? Why and how did you select these issues?

My priorities are the onboarding of the new Superintendent, addressing pandemic-related learning loss and transitioning away from hybrid teaching in the fall.

I put onboarding the new Superintendent first because without stable, supportive leadership at the top everything else tends to fall apart. Given the turmoil in our recent history with 7 Superintendents in 7 years, I expect I do not need to explain the implications to FUSE members, but I will have more on this below.

I put pandemic-related learning loss second because I am deeply concerned about the impact the pandemic has had on youngsters. I fear we are still years away from fully understanding the devastating impact learning loss has had on the current generation of students. Not only that, but I listened carefully at the last board meeting to the presentation on summer school. I did not come away convinced it was a plan to address learning loss and social-emotional issues. I have heard nothing so far about the 2021-22 school year and beyond.

This priority ties back to onboarding the new Superintendent because he will need to hit the ground running on this issue from day one and the quicker he has his sea legs the quicker we can move on to other priorities foremost among them implementing actionable plans to address the near-term and long-term implications of learning loss and the social-emotional needs of students.

I put transitioning away from hybrid teaching because, as my wife has done hybrid teaching, I am familiar with how disruptive it can be for the teachers. It is exhausting and can be emotionally draining for teachers; almost like having to teach a dozen or more classrooms at the same time. It is certainly sub-optimal for students especially younger children. Remote teaching is better than hybrid teaching but still a poor substitute for in-class teaching.

I fully support the NYSUT call to end hybrid teaching going into the Fall and fully support Randi Weingarten of the AFT calling for all schools to be open for five days a week of in-person learning for the next academic year.

I could mention other concerns such as safety and security but identifying priorities means making choices. I would start with these three but remain open to a better case being made for concerns I believe we all share that did not make my top three. I will address some of those below.

Finally, as the pandemic has shown, expect the black swan (the unexpected).

2. What are the strengths of the school system, and how do you believe a board can utilize and build upon these? Please give specific examples.

The district has been in a bit of rough seas over the past several years. There has been significant disagreements among board members, some of which were put on public display at board meetings. There have been distressing incidents of violence in, and around, our schools. There has been a major academic scandal. There has been a revolving door at the central office.

Our sea wall, our bulwark, has been our superior teachers. The good news for New Rochelle is that teachers tend to have long careers and remain loyal to the school community. It can be quick and easy to turn over top administrators or board members; less so an entire faculty. The bad news is that if our sea wall continues to be battered eventually it will show cracks. We are not at the stage yet but if we continue to have issues with board governance and cabinet-level leadership, even our superior teachers will not be enough of a bulwark to protect our school system.

We cannot afford another period of instability like we have had with 7 Superintendents in 7 years.

Building back better, to borrow a phrase, means supporting our teachers starting with a fair contract. From there it is incumbent on the board to get its act together — enough with the board overreach and micromanaging! Despite reservations some may

have, for the sake of our school district we need to wish our new Superintendent well and give him a chance to succeed. For any group of people, it is important someone steps forward to assert leadership, but it is equally important that the rest of the group let that person lead. That sense of mutuality between the leader (the Superintendent) and the led (the individual school board members) must be restored if we are going to build on our bedrock — superior teachers — which will only come through the support of dedicated administrators, led by an excellent Superintendent, backed up by a board that understands its role and acts accordingly.

All of that must exist within a framework of involved parents and students who show up each day eager to learn, funded by generous and supportive taxpayers who write the checks that pay the bills that fund the school system.

My primary interaction with FUSE comes through the District-Wide Health and Safety Committee. I am proud of my role on that committee because we have worked hard with the administration to deliver *equity through infrastructure*.

There have been more than a few in our community, including on the school board and half the school board candidates running in this election, who have sought to portray our district as an example of systemic or structural racism. They make this unfounded and absurd claim based on an overly simplistic and often inaccurate incantation of data on graduation rates, enrollment in AP classes or other measures of academic performance.

From my work on the District-Wide Health and Safety Committee I know I can show them \$125 mm in capital spending over the last 5 years — a rather large check written by the taxpayers of New Rochelle through bond and budget referendums. This is a school community willing to put its money where its mouth is to get every school to a state-rating of "satisfactory" and above (recall, in the last Building Condition Survey in 2016, every school flunked with a state-rating of "unsatisfactory"). More than half that money was spent on New Rochelle High School where all students across the district currently attend grades 9 to 12.

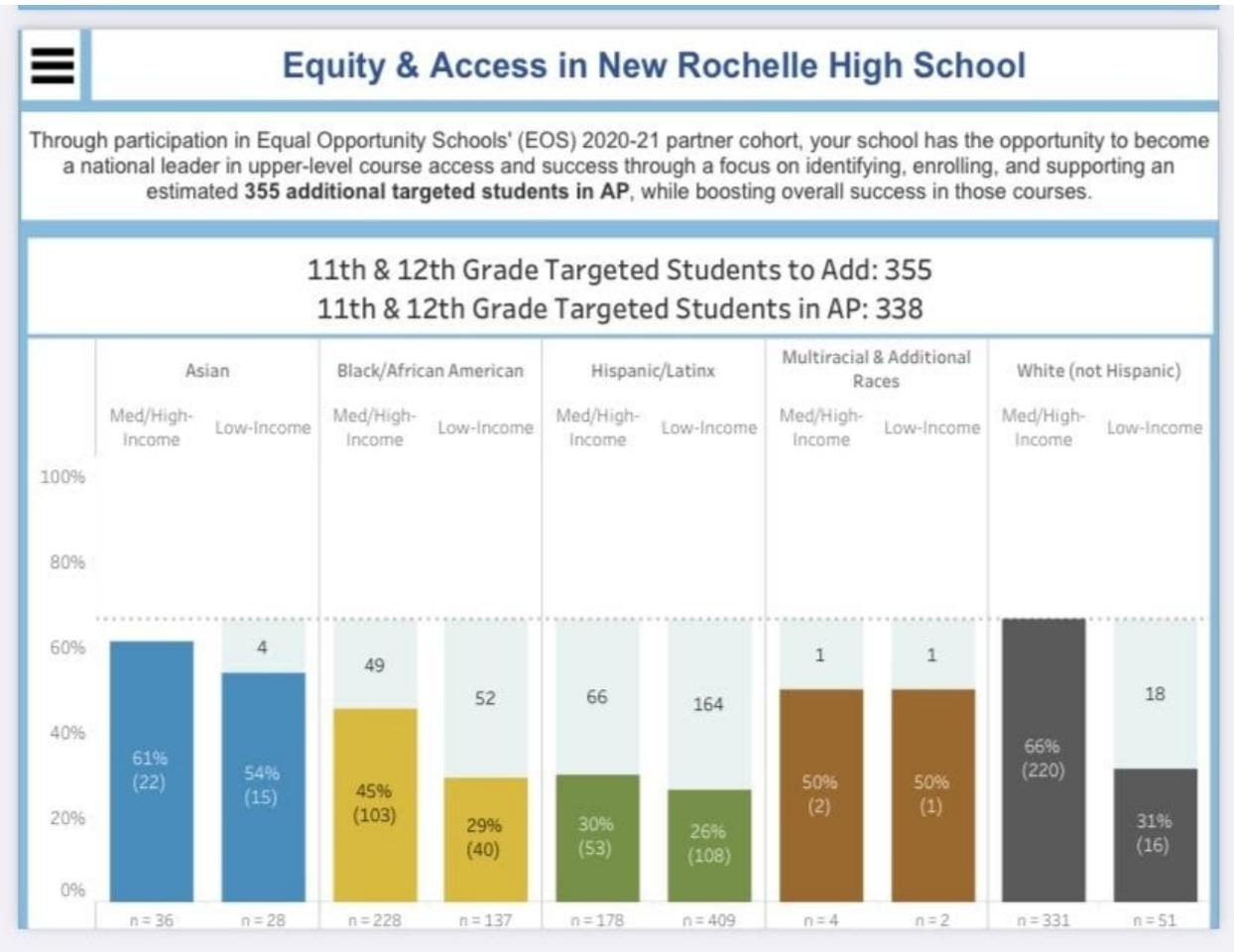
A look at the federal Financial Transparency Report shows our per-pupil spending is balanced across every building in the District.

We do not have "superior" teachers in one building and not another.

Our teachers do not work hard in one school and not in another.

Back to phony claims that systemic or structural racism is somehow "proven" because, as one candidate falsely claimed, AP enrollment is 15% Black and 15% Hispanic. Setting aside that the claim is inaccurate in and of itself, we have recent, *accurate* data which was presented to the school board at the August 4, 2020, meeting which tells a dramatically different (and true) story of success with minority enrollment in AP Courses.

The data is the only time I have seen New Rochelle High School AP enrollment data broken down by race/ethnicity AND income as it should be.



In the aggregate, data presented by Interim Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero on August 4th 2020 noted the AP enrollment in 11th and 12th grade breaks down as; Black (155), Hispanic (161), White (236), Asian (37) a total of 589 enrolled students out of a cohort of 1,398 students. On a percentage basis the breakdown is Black (26%), Hispanic (27%), White (40%), Asian (6%). Black and Hispanic students now comprise the majority of students enrolled in AP classes at New Rochelle High School.

This data contradicts claims made by one of my opponents who stated at a candidate forum that Black and Hispanic each stand at 15% for AP classes.

More broadly, percentages of AP enrollment roughly correlate to the population of non-economically disadvantaged students in the High School and suggest that disparities in AP enrollment is a function of economic differences and not race. It should

be noted that access to this type of data is extremely limited, and I do have some reservations as to the quality of the data that was presented.

This is not to say Systemic Racism does not exist in our society.

One of the most damaging examples is "RedLining". Back in the 1930s the Home Owners' Loan Corporation drew on maps to "grade" desirability for a given geographical area which created a significant amount of the structural imbalance in our society, mostly within and around cities.

The impact of Redlining, long since banned, is still felt today because as it applied to real estate values it denied people living in redlined areas, mostly minorities, primarily black, from buying a home and thus transferring intergenerational wealth within families, an economic disadvantage that compounds over time.

Home Owners' Loan Corporation, now defunct, was a sister-organization to the Federal National Mortgage Association, commonly known as Fannie Mae, and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, commonly known as Freddie Mac. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac buy mortgages from mortgage lenders and either sell them as investments to other financial institutions or buy and hold for their portfolio. Their criteria for purchasing mortgages are the industry standard for mortgage loan qualification.

During the Clinton Administration, the Congressional Black Caucus pushed for redress for the harmful effects of redlining by creating new ways for people without access to credit to get a mortgage with the broader goal of increasing black homeownership. The Clinton Administration brought the challenge to Fannie Mae Vice Chairman Franklin Delano Raines who would go on to become Clinton's Director of the Office of Management and Budget and later the Chairman of Fannie Mae.

In 1995, Raines hired a management consulting firm out of New York to embed a team of bright young MBAs within Fannie Mae headquarters in Washington, DC for the better part of a year. Their task was to do a deep dive into the impact of redlining which created so-called "B" and "C" credits (people with little or no access to traditional means of establishing a credit history) then make recommendations to Fannie Mae, the

White House and the Congressional Black Caucus on how to ease credit requirements on loans that Fannie Mae purchased from banks and thereby increase the number of minority and low-income homeowners.

One of those bright young MBAs was me.

I spent months in the Fannie Mae library on Wisconsin Avenue pouring through research on redlining to understand how it worked, the damage that it caused, all to come up with ways to undo the damage.

As a result of my work at Fannie Mae, I am intimately acquainted with the pernicious effects of redlining and know that much of the black poverty we see today is the result of this form of structural racism. Because I know this topic well, I can say this — systemic racism exists, the impact of it on black wealth creation carries down to us today, and it *is* manifest in our schools today, but our schools are not the *perpetrators* of systemic or structural racism. Rather, systemic racism writ large in our society manifests itself in our schools because we are a public school district in a diverse community and welcome all youngsters including low-income Black students.

We do not have a systemic racism problem caused by our schools but rather a poverty problem caused, in part by things like redlining and other forms of systemic racism, which manifests itself in our schools.

That is a vastly different, and accurate, way to frame the issue. By correctly framing the issue as poverty we can dispense with the troubling rhetoric of “ending the war” or “winning peace” propounded by some organizations backing multiple candidates who are more interested in finger-pointing to score cheap political points and sell snake oil to those who do not know our school community in a meaningful way.

Correctly framing the issue as poverty empowers the community to get down to what actually matters, that we want all youngsters to succeed and not all youngsters are succeeding. I believe it is more constructive to move forward on this basis because accusations of racism are both polarizing and inaccurate, and tend to divide people thus making consensus-based solutions inaccessible to our children.

Even with an accurate context, there are *still* some candidates who apparently believe that *nothing* is being done in New Rochelle to help lower-performing, low-income students, especially low-income black and Hispanic students as they propose to solve this problem. This notion can only come from people who know nothing about our school community which offers a wide-range of support programs targeting disadvantaged youth. To name a few: in-school and after-school programs, the Boys & Girls Club, the Guidance Center, WestCap, the New Rochelle Municipal Housing Authority, Refugio de Esperanza (Mariano's church), and many others.

I know I have been overly specific, but I have given a lot of thought to this over the years, and I am thoroughly fed up with uninformed newcomers bad-mouthing our teachers and administrators by projecting their political ideology, imported from outside New Rochelle, onto our school community in an effort to whip up emotions by portraying our City and our School District as fundamentally racist. That sort of divisive and false narrative has no place on a school board. I have publicly challenged this destructive mindset as a parent, spouse of a teacher and a journalist and would continue to do so if elected to the board.

3. What do you consider to be the weaknesses or areas in need of improvement in the CSDNR? How does the board play a role in changing this? Please give specific examples.

As you may appreciate by now, I am not a big fan of telling people what they want to hear or walking around on eggshells. I speak my mind fully aware that doing so makes some people uncomfortable or can be misunderstood or even deliberately misconstrued. Risking unsettling some members, I am going to present my unvarnished thoughts on this fundamentally important question.

Something is fundamentally wrong with our school system and its culture. It is not that there are not superior teachers, engaged parents, inspirational administrators, or willing students but something is *off*, and it's been off for a while.

The best way I can put it is that we are all pulling our oars, but the boat is not moving forward in a straight line. There is a lot of effort going on in our schools but no one is in charge of the boat, and we are off-course.

From Wikipedia:

In rowing, the coxswain (no relation!) sits in either the bow or the stern of the boat while verbally and physically controlling the boat's steering, speed, timing, and fluidity. The primary duty of a coxswain is to ensure the safety of those in the boat. In a race setting, the coxswain is tasked with motivating the crew as well as steering as straight a course as possible to minimize the distance to the finish line.

A coxswain is the coach in the boat, in addition to following the orders of the team coach, the coxswain is connected to the way the boat feels, what's working, what needs to be changed, and how. A successful coxswain must keep track of the drill, time, pace, words of the coach, feel of the boat, direction of the boat, and safety. During a race, a coxswain is responsible for steering, calling the moves, and responding to the way the other boats are moving. Success depends on the physical and mental strength of the rowers, ability to respond to the environment, and the way in which the coxswain motivates the rowers, not only as individuals but as members of the crew.

Without a leader ensuring the health and safety of those in our schools, a person motivating “the crew” while guiding us forward, we cannot steer a straight course to the finish line. Success depends on the crew — the faculty, administrators, staff, parents, students and the larger school community — but it is the coxswain (the Superintendent) who motivates and provides direction to “the rowers” (the rest of us), not only as individuals but as members of “the crew”.

The weaknesses of the City School District of New Rochelle is a lack of steady, reliable leadership not seen in our community since the days of Dr. Gaddy and Linda Kelly. A major cause of that weakness, especially in recent years, has been the politicization of the board over time to the point where personal, political ideology is too often informing board discussion decisions, and actions.

The dam broke in 2018 when Mattali Attalah resigned from the board and Jeffrey Hastie became Vice President of the school board, a position he used to undermine the Board President, the Superintendent and the entire chain of command while leading an

effort to depopulate district leadership (14 of 15 top positions in the district would be vacant or filled by interim appointments), defeat the budget and sack the Superintendent. The rest of the hatchet job was completed by Amy Moselhi, Hastie's Vice President and successor as President. The pair is inarguably the two worst Board Presidents in the modern history of the New Rochelle Board of Education (and that is saying something given the history).

Under their Reign of Terror, New Rochelle became known as a "no go" zone for quality administrators who shunned our district. They are the two most responsible for the perception that we have a rogue board. They are the cause of churning through 4 Superintendents in 2 years (Osborne, Parvey, Feijóo and Marrero) with a fifth on their way (presumably Raymond). The good news is Hastie has left the Country and Moselhi is now an ineffectual backbencher with one year left on her term.

However, we are left to rebuild our culture and reputation in the wake of the destruction left behind by Hastie and Moselhi. We are now faced with a level of flight out of our schools like we have never seen before, and it will have grave consequences educationally and financially. There are deep schisms between the employees, the administration, and board. Trust that all important glue that keeps it all together, is at an all-time low.

This is all to say that it is the board itself that is the area in need of improvement in the CSDNR and the role the board can play is to drop the pretense that individual board members should involve themselves in day-to-day operations of the district — they do not develop curriculum or write RFPs or negotiate union contracts or evaluate teachers or wander around schools uninvited, taking photos of employees and other people's children to post on Facebook.

The board needs to step back, stay in its lane, and let educational leaders lead and let teachers run their classrooms.

The role reserved to the board, as a body, is to (1) hire a Superintendent, set goals for him or her, then evaluate their performance against those goals, (2) set district policy, and (3) adopt an appropriate budget.

At the top of the list needs to be getting everyone in the school rowing together, to create a school culture of trust and working together to move forward in as straight a line as possible to get our students to the finish line, high school graduates who are ready for college and/or a career.

**4. What experience should every district administrator have?
Please elaborate.**

I cannot imagine a person even wanting to be a school administrator if they do not enjoy working with young people. No one should have a position of responsibility in a school district that does not have a history of meaningful engagement with youngsters in an educational setting.

It may be tempting for a candidate addressing FUSE to say that every district administrator should have experience as a classroom teacher. I have heard that in New Rochelle regarding Superintendents like Dr. Alex Marrero and Jonathon Raymond but going back further to Richard Organisciak.

I am going to be straight with you as I always aim to be.

My wife has been a special educator for 30 years, most of that time in the City School District of New Rochelle. She has her administrative certificate from Teachers College where she has been on the faculty for two decades. She has been CSE Chairperson and an out-of-district and bi-lingual evaluator. I believe had she been given the opportunity to serve as Director of Special Education she would have done an excellent job despite having never run a traditional classroom. That experience shaped my views on this question that good administrators do not need to have classroom teaching experience to succeed.

I believe that it is not disqualifying that an administrator does not have experience running or even working in a classroom professionally as a teacher, TA or other staff, but it is a requirement that they have a history of meaningful engagement with youngsters in some form of an educational setting whether it be professionally as a member of

pedagogical staff or personally through volunteer work, coaching, Sunday/Sabbath school, or other community engagement.

There are what I might call more vocational administrative positions such as HR Director, IT Director, Public Information Officer, School Business Official, Board Clerk, Treasurer or Facilities Director. These are positions that require or at least benefit heavily from particular professional skill sets such as lawyer, accountant, or engineer, to name a few. I would not expect these administrators to have been a classroom teacher, but I would expect, and require they can demonstrate meaningful engagement with youngsters in an educational setting before hiring them.

5. Boards can have serious disagreements. What is your style for handling dissention at the table?

Anyone who knows me even a little knows I am a big talker! Ask my wife and four kids who will agree that this is perhaps the understatement of the campaign :-)

Members may not know, I have made countless public appearances over the years on radio and television programs, been a speaker at media and technology industry conferences and a lecturer at colleges and universities across the country. So, while I admit to talking (and writing) for a living I want FUSE members to consider that despite my penchant for the blarney (yes, my mom's family were Irish immigrants and yes, I have kissed the Blarney Stone, twice), I am an equally good, maybe better, active listener.

As most FUSE members surely know, I have actively engaged in hundreds of board meetings over the past 13 years. Some have said to me "you are always talking at board meetings". I point out to them that board meetings typically last several hours. Public comment lasts 3 minutes per speaker. So, while I do talk at many board meetings, 99% of the time I am in active listening mode — not just sitting in a meeting but listening, observing interactions, reading the meeting packet, watching slide presentations, and taking notes. You will rarely, if ever, see me in a meeting without pen

and paper, scribbling away, documenting what board members, administrators, outside consultants and other school community members have to say.

Anyone who has seen me in committee meetings knows I mostly listen. When I participate or lead meetings in active listening mode what I am listening for is where we can agree so that when I eventually do speak I am seeking to acknowledge the input around the table, summarize the areas of agreement, document them and try to guide the conversation, so we can build from those common areas of agreement.

Every so often we get to consensus right away other times we do not. At that point, I support tabling a discussion to allow for further reflection. I will typically work the phones between meetings in the hope of getting us to consensus. Ultimately, we vote. Occasionally, my views prevail, and sometimes I have to accept that my views do not carry the day but regardless we move on to the next discussion and carry on with our work.

6. What has your experience with unions been and what role should they play in policy and district operations?

I have an MBA in Economics and Strategy from the University of Chicago where I took courses in labor relations. So, on a technical level, I want to first differentiate between unions as an organization and union members. The National Labor Relations Board recognizes that employees have a job to do each work day, and so they have a legal right to elect, and pay money, to form a union and have representation through that union. A union once created has specific enumerated rights under Federal and State law and, if a public sector union in New York State, certain limitations.

Generally speaking, union leaders represent employees in a variety of ways, in good faith, and without discrimination, in virtually every action that a union may take in dealing with an employer, including collective bargaining and handling grievances. Unions typically play a role in policy and district operations at this level but certainly advocate on policy and district operations.

Given the laws and the history of unions, the nature of the relationship between union and management is, by its nature, adversarial and while individual members of union leadership and management strive to be professional, collegial, and polite to the extent possible, at the end of the day the relationship between union and management is essentially based on negotiating how to best allocate scarce resources, primarily money, and it is natural that both sides will often disagree on the best way to allocate scarce resources.

One of the most important, state-mandated roles for the union to impact policy and district operations is on the issue of workplace safety.

My primary experience with New Rochelle FUSE is a collaborative one, as a member of the District-Wide Health and Safety Committee. I have been a member since 2016 and am currently co-Chair.

I have served with A/S Presidents Melissa Passarelli, and Joseph Starvaggi before her. I have served with FUSE Presidents Mary Breslin, and Marty Daly before her as well as FUSE SRP Vice President Billy Coleman and FUSE Vice President Aisha Cook.

As an effective leader on state-mandated committees, I know how much hard work is put in by building leaders, union leaders, PTA Council members, Board members and City officials.

The District-Wide Health and Safety Committee is mandated under the REbuild SChools to Uphold Education (RESCUE) Law of 1998. The primary function of the Health and Safety Committee is to address health and safety concerns in occupied buildings.

Representation on the committee is meant to include staff and teacher unions along with parents and community members. At its core, it is essentially a workplace safety committee and as such is meant to be imbalanced favoring union members with a mission to ensure that all school facilities are healthy and safe for all occupants — teachers and staff, parents and students, administrators and guests.

In my leadership role on various committees, I have had shared oversight responsibility on school construction under the \$106.5mm bond passed by voters in

2016 which has resulted in upgrading our schools from 100% “unsatisfactory” ratings in 2016 to a projected 100% “satisfactory” rating in 2022; developing exciting new technologies that will empower all members of the school community to report and track issues with our school buildings on their smartphone; developing criteria to select a “forever home” for the alternative high school; and writing a complex application for a New York State — U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School Award for an elementary school.

In the current school year, I have worked with Billy and Mary to address a particular COVID-19 related concern this year — ventilation. This topic has been on the agenda I prepare each month since November (as it got colder and became a more pressing issue). Together, we pushed for the first-ever round of ventilation testing. At our recommendation, the District hired a ventilation testing company to conduct random sampling of airflow in classrooms, hallways and other spaces at every school building in the district. A preliminary, verbal report made to the committee is promising, the final written report is expected any day and will be both posted to NRED and discussed at our June 2 meeting via Zoom. All are welcome.

7. The current law firm, Ingerman Smith, has more than tripled the previous firm's costs and has far exceeded the District’s budgeted legal costs for both years they have been employed by the district. How would you address the fee structure and costs of a district’s law firm?

If elected, my first official act as board member (at my second meeting as I would not want to intrude on the first meeting of the new board officers), would be to make/support a motion to issue a new RFP for legal services and terminate the Ingerman Smith contract. That motion may not pass, but it will put on the record who is and who is not supporting Ingerman Smith. I will continue to make that motion periodically until we get 5 votes.

I will always be a resounding NO on Ingerman Smith.

As the leading proponent of firing the previous law firm, let me say Ingerman Smith has been so bad, on so many levels, that they have almost caused me to pine for “the good old days” of Jeff Kehl. We can and must do better than both these firms.

I am well aware that Ingerman Smith is not the darling of FUSE. I have my own reasons for wanting them gone in addition to the division Ingerman Smith has fostered between FUSE and the Board. They have blocked my reporting, interfered with getting answers on administrative hires, the Feijóo circus, violating the Freedom of Information Law and Open Meetings Law and more.

I am heartily sick of Ingerman Smith.

They need to be shown the door as rapidly as possible so that their excessive billing drops to zero, where it belongs.

I would favor exploring the option of in-house counsel as is the case with the City of New Rochelle before hiring a new outside counsel.

8. Linda Kelly and Dr. Gaddy have legacies that are revered in New Rochelle schools by both staff and community. Mary Jane Reddington, Nadine Wallace, Deidre Polow, and Pearl Quarles all have revered legacies as outstanding Board members who unified and strengthened our schools and community and ultimately expanded our students' opportunities and outcomes. How would you ensure that your Board legacy is one to be proud of?

This is quite an impressive list of people who in their day played a major role in the transformation of the New Rochelle School District into one of the most widely admired districts in the country, with its crown jewel, New Rochelle High School, which was for years ranked among the Top 100 high schools in the nation.

I recall at her first board meeting, Valerie Williams said the goal of her tenure was to restore the district to what it had been when she attended the New Rochelle schools. She was surely referring to the district under the leadership of the people referenced in the question and I share her view.

I believe I am the only candidate who has actually met all the people listed in this question let alone knows and understands their legacy.

I am proud to say that among that list of standouts, Linda Kelly, Nadine Wallace, and Deidre Polow are all supporting my campaign, and although I have not asked her since I filed to run last week, Pearl Quarles has supported me in the past.

These educational leaders each led in their own way but share many attributes in common: deep roots in the New Rochelle school community, great pride in our superior teachers, a strong commitment to public education and an abiding passion for educating and developing young minds to reach their full potential.

Each of these people were known to be patient listeners who lead by example; who understood the importance of the board working with the Superintendent to support our teachers and staff in delivering on educational excellence in the classroom — something that has been lost over the past years with unprecedented instability at the top: 7 Superintendents in 7 years.

All but Pearl, were or are experienced educators. Linda Kelly and Dr. Gaddy taught at New Rochelle High School, Nadine Wallace was up until quite recently a speech therapist at Southern Westchester BOCES, Dee Polow is a guidance counselor in the Bronx. All had or have a strong understanding of teachers as the foundation upon which schools deliver high quality educational opportunities for students.

I am not a teacher, but my wife has been a Special Educator in the District for more than 20 years, we raised all of our children in New Rochelle, they all attended the New Rochelle public schools and each graduated from New Rochelle High School.

There has been quite a bit of talk in this campaign, during candidate forums and in online advertisements, of “ending the war” or “winning the peace”. I cannot fathom a slate of board candidates (there are four) supported by a self-described political “movement” that is a de facto political party which actively engages in fundraising, runs candidates for elective office to promote policies and legislation, and otherwise has as its mission to advance a particular political ideology and less so that one of their candidates sees the role of board member in terms of the violent rhetoric of combat.

These four candidates should reject such divisive rhetoric or at least explain what war it is they imagine is occurring in our school community and how they intend to treat the vanquished should they achieve their political ends at the expense of teachers, students, parents, and taxpayers.

We are not a community at war but people of good will who want the best for our school system.

The key to success at the board level is not combat and political pandering but listening, finding points of agreement and building on those points of agreement to patiently achieve consensus.

What has been missing in our school district over the past decade has been proper board governance which has resulted in instability throughout the administration. Not too long ago all but one of the top 15 administrative positions in our district were either vacant or held by interim hires. New Rochelle has become a district that top quality administrators avoid due to the (accurate) perception that we have had a rogue board. I want to be a part of building on the work of Rachel Relkin undertaken this past year to repair that image.

There are no coincidences.

If I were elected and did nothing else in my term I would feel it was productive if it restored board members to their proper roles. Board members need to stay in their lane, to not intrude on the ministerial responsibilities of the Superintendent, to avoid breaking the chain of command by engaging directly with teachers, staff, and administrators below the level Superintendent and leaving it to the Board President to deal with the Superintendent.

There are specific changes that have occurred since the days of the likes of Linda Kelly and Dr. Gaddy or Nadine, Dee, Pearl, and Mary Jane.

By law, Board members have absolutely no authority outside of acting as a body. We have gotten away from that.

I strongly oppose board members sitting on confidential contract negotiating committees. The Board ultimately has to ratify a union contract, so they should not be

active participants in negotiating that same contract. Union contracts should be negotiated between labor professionals and appointed union negotiators. Over the past several years, three board members have sat on the negotiating committee. It is not just Ingerman Smith that has been a source of problems in the just completed negotiations but Ingerman Smith actively encouraging board member participation in the negotiations. That needs to end.

I strongly oppose the manipulative practice of creating prodigious numbers of ad hoc committees to promote political agenda, especially when they include School Board Members not only on committees but chairing committees. It is pointless for Board Members to lead ad hoc committees that are intended to make recommendations to the Board through ad hoc committees. It is board members making recommendations to themselves. No Board Members should ever sit on ad hoc committees. They must be on board-only committees. They can be on the two state-mandated committees (SAVE, RESCUE) but limited to one board member per committee and never as co-Chair.

I strongly oppose the School Buddy Program. I recognize the program has a cute-sounding, warm-and-fuzzy name, but the effect of the program is to directly undercut building principals who are responsible for both managing their buildings and protecting their staff from perhaps well-intentioned but often meddling board members.

I oppose School Board Meetings at schools. School board meetings are business meetings with central office staff that do the business of the entire City School District of New Rochelle. They should be held in District-wide settings of which there are two: the central office building (City Hall) and New Rochelle High School (primarily budget hearings). I would support exceptions based on space considerations like budget meetings or high-interest meetings like post-Sandy Hook or post-January 2018.

The thought behind these programs is the idea that it is important for board members to be present in the schools. It is! But Mary Jane Reddington, Nadine Wallace, Deidre Polow, and Pearl Quarles were not present in schools because they

were assigned to be a school buddy. They were present in the schools because they were engaged members of the school community who *wanted* to be in the schools, who *enjoyed* being in the schools, but also knew to limit that engagement to public events such as theater and choral productions, sporting events, stepping-up ceremonies, graduations and so on.

If I were elected to the board I would seek counsel from Linda, Nadine, Dee and Pearl, and other experienced members of the New Rochelle school community such as Mario Scarano and Joe Fosina — people who I know and are supporting my campaign — on how best to unify and strengthen our schools and community, and expand our students' opportunities and outcomes.

It starts with understanding the proper role of the board and its members and knowing not to “play Superintendent” by micro-managing our professional staff at the central office and building level.

It ends with appreciating that you cannot know where you're headed if you don't know where you've been. History and context matter.