

The Middletown Parent Action Committee
2018 Board of Education Candidate Statements

While each school maintains its own formal PTA pages and informal parent groups, we realized that there was not a single "informal" group where parents could present concerns, questions and build consensus on issues that impacted us as a district, that was not regulated by the district.

We found that because of the sheer size of our district it had been difficult to work together and collaborate and share information. By using social media we have been able to work cooperatively, share ideas, and information and provide resources to our members.

One of the initial issues that we sought to address was understanding the positions of each of the Candidates on the various hot button topics that impact our district and often flood our page with comments and debate. We have learned from many things from these discussions, most importantly that we often have different viewpoints and values when it comes to what we find important for our children.

As such, it is critical to understand the perspectives of the Candidates that we will elect to act as OUR representatives to the Administration. We felt that it would be beneficial to offer each of the Candidates the opportunity to provide position statements on some of the issues we feel are significant to our community. We compiled a list from the questions and comments you provided. We asked each Candidate to provide a brief position statement of no more than a 150-175 words on each issue. Unfortunately, Mr. Fox was unable to participate in this survey. We do wish him luck in the upcoming election.

The Board of Education is not a partisan committee. It is a volunteer position that members of our community undertake to improve the lives of our children and our community. We hope that this review assists you in making well-informed decisions about Candidates that best represent you and your family's needs. We are grateful for their voices and for the time that they have taken to provide us this insight. We wish them all much luck!

Sincerely,

Administrators of the Middletown Parent Action Committee

| Candidate: | Joan Minnuies | Tom Giaimo | Deborah Wright | David Mercus |
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| <p>Multiple plans have been developed to address overcrowding, which plan i.e., redistricting, maintaining status quo, moving border lines, building new schools, providing school choice to overcrowded schools/ all schools to cap would you most likely support.</p> | <p>I would not support any of these options until we have involved the public in the process. I believe it is time to reopen the Strategic Plan with equal representation from all schools. There is no easy answer to this problem. The one thing I will say for sure is that I have never believed in closing schools, and my gut tells me that our community will not support this either.</p> | <p>The answer may lie in a combination of different plans. We should not constrain ourselves to the existing proposals. We need more input from the public, we need updated data from demographers who can forecast student population trending so we know what lies ahead. Student population is declining but it is not declining evenly throughout the district. The Board should consider hiring an independent consultant with expertise in overcrowding who can provide an objective opinion as to how the community should resolve these issues. We should consider forming a committee with (2) representatives from each school so that the Board can understand the concerns of the entire township and build a consensus. Other options include creating additional pathways or “magnet schools” where students can pursue what they are passionate about. As we navigate through the enrollment challenges we must maintain a true equity of opportunity for every student. I am reluctant to close any neighborhood school. Our children’s sense of “community” comes from two places: their home and their school. To close a child’s local school would adversely impact that sense of community.</p> | <p>It’s difficult to take a position when I’m not privy to the information the current Board has in their possession. The redistricting plan proposed last year divided the entire district, so I don’t think it’s helpful to take a position before being afforded the opportunity to digest the data and meet with the interested stakeholders, the community. We cannot afford to make the same mistake twice. We need a new population study conducted by a demographer to project future student growth. As that study is prepared, the Board needs to host meetings with each individual school community (all 17) to discuss their concerns. General meetings are fine, but not everyone is afforded the opportunity to speak. Working with each PTA/PFA and principals of each school, surveys should also be distributed to increase community participation. The Board should then create a working group with representatives from each school, which includes faculty members, to better understand their concerns, build consensus, and formulate a strategic plan together. A goal of the Board must always be that all schools are treated equally. We will only be able to finally solve this problem by working with the community.</p> | <p>We do have a problem with enrollment right now at three of our current schools. This has been a problem for years, but its time to begin the process of fixing this issue. We need to not only be looking at how our students fall on a map, but also looking at how many students are going to be on the street in the future by estimating turnover of older residents who are selling to young families. That turnover is what has been driving the enrollment boom in these three schools. Once we can interpret the we can formulate a plan to accommodate a proper school enrollment environment for our students, teachers and administrators. One thing that should remain very clear with regards to me moving boundary lines, if needed, is that I would "grandfather" every child that is currently in the district to maintain their school path through high school. No children should ever be removed from their schools and I would not support a plan that did that. This would be a gradual plan that would be put together with absolute community input as well as real data with regards to an enrollment map, but also future predictions of turnover.</p> |

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| <p>Do you believe that Village School should be designated to one school path and not be provided a choice of high schools?</p> | <p>Village School has had choice since the late 90's. The whole question of choice for not just Village, but also for the Bayshore feeder schools needs to be looked at as part of the Strategic Plan. If changes are recommended, I would only support a policy that grandfather's current students.</p> | <p>This is an issue that must be incorporated within the discussion as to how we as a school district address and implement an equitable plan that tackles the overcrowding and enrollment challenge. I would advocate for the Board's solicitation of additional data and I would insist that there be a true and open opportunity for critical community input from parents on this question. I fully support the concept of uniformity and equality of opportunity across the educational spectrum for all students. As an attorney that has for 30+ years provided legal guidance to Boards of Trustees I have never wavered in my counsel to those Boards to treat everyone uniformly. Disparate treatment runs counter to the way I lead my life and the manner in which I have guided Boards on issues that affect the general population. No one should be accorded different or preferential treatment to the detriment of others. Every decision made by the BOE must reflect the Board's best judgment and the best overall interest of every family in the district. I would still permit "grandfathering" for any Village Elementary student who has already begun their studies.</p> | <p>This question is equally as difficult to answer as the first one because it falls within the larger redistricting issue facing the district. This is one example of inconsistent policies throughout the district, as students living in Leonardo do not have "school choice" to attend High School North which is much closer to the vast majority of their homes. I would follow the same plan that I outlined in the first question and include this issue in the overall work the BOE must do together with the community. As I said at the Village "Meet the Candidate" night, I would not want to see existing children separated from the friends they established relationships with by being forced to attend a different school. Many parents also have been relying on this policy as well. One thing I would consider as part of any new plan would be to "grandfather" all existing students to avoid the separation issue.</p> | <p>I believe giving parents choices and could not see removing this choice from Village parents as being something that would be productive for those children.</p> |

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| <p>With consideration of recent cuts to state and federal funding and increases in property taxes for homeowners, would you be willing to end bonuses and or cut administrative costs, by reducing administrative positions, over teachers, supplies and student programs?</p> | <p>I would be willing to look into all areas that do not directly affect students. The current Board has already reduced an administrative position due to this year's cuts. Everything is on the table for next year.</p> | <p>I am willing to eliminate bonuses for certain administrative personnel and cut costs by reducing certain administrative positions in order to avoid terminating teachers and educational support professionals. The day-to-day operations and the quality of educational experience should not be adversely impacted by the cuts we may continue to experience going forward. The new school funding formula is simply not working and is unfair. It is especially unfair to Middletown because we are a socially and economically diverse community. As a member of the Board of Education I will commit to working alongside of local elected officials and in close coordination with our Senate and Assembly representatives in fighting against cuts in school aid and in developing and implementing a school funding formula which is fair and sustainable. We cannot continue on this path....we will lose teachers and we will certainly lose those who aspire to be teachers. Cuts should be directed at the administration but if we are compelled to terminate a teaching position or positions so too must the administration take a hit.</p> | <p>Absolutely. This year alone, the district lost \$1.2 million in funding, and current projections show a \$6.2 million deficit over a seven-year period if the State's education budget isn't modified. Even though the district was able to quickly balance the budget, it was at great costs to the children as vacant teacher lines were cut from the budget and curriculum upgrades were postponed – both necessary and fundamental resources for the education of our kids. As a community, we cannot continue to strip away vital teacher positions and resources to balance budgets. We cannot allow already large, maximum class sizes to increase, which will further decrease support of individualized learning for all children. We can't cut needed wellness programing and support positions. The entire budget needs to be re-examined, focusing on the costs on the administration side, such as director positions, bonuses, and other expenses, that we might be able to eliminate before eliminating teacher positions and necessary curriculum. The budget also can't be reduced solely by cutting capital funding, because those "one-shot" funding streams are not carried over into future budgets. Even though the administration proposes which budget cuts to make to the BOE, each board member owes a fiduciary duty to the district and the children it serves, and must reject a budget that does not adequately take these issues into consideration.</p> | <p>With these cuts in mind, as well as further cuts in the future, all cost saving measures would be up for consideration. Administrative costs would certainly be a consideration as well as bonus cuts, but administrative contracts also need to be honored. Our administration has done a tremendous job the past couple years and our district's performance has been a result of that. That being said, maintaining a safe and proper classroom for our children and teachers is always my top priority and would be the first thing on my mind as we consider ways to reduce costs.</p> |

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| <p>Would you support and advocate for policies that address later start times for high school students, scheduling to better meet needs of working parents, and more open information dissemination like classroom assignments, supply lists at end of school year rather than days before classes resume?</p> | <p>Although the research recommends later start times for high school students, there are many issues that need to be looked into before the district could recommend a change. Later start times is not just a Middletown issue. In order to consider this, other districts would need to change also to coordinate after school competitions, and bussing. I would support a statewide initiative to look into changing start times.</p> <p>I have no problem supporting early dissemination of information when that information is available.</p> | <p>This is a complex issue. The educational science field has concluded that younger children learn more earlier in the morning while older students perform better when they start school later in the day. This however presents a myriad of problems as most households have two income earners and it is hard to juggle different starting times. Middletown participates in the Jersey Shore Athletic Conference, which will not accommodate us if the district implements later starting times for high school students. This would also affect every single club at the high school level (debate club, math club, etc.) I believe that the Colts Neck district is piloting a program this year where its high school students start their instruction later in the morning but are permitted to leave earlier if they participate in sports or other extracurricular activities. By leaving earlier in the day those students are short changed in receiving instructional education. We cannot value sports at the expense of instructional time. In addition, at the elementary level an alteration in start times would extend both pre-care and after care, which are an expense to taxpayers. With respect to classroom assignments, I fully endorse that concept. There is no downside to allowing a student to understand what will be required of him/her as the next school year begins. With many students having access to computers, the required supplies should be more limited than they were in the past. The district should collaborate with certain vendors (Amazon, Target, etc.) so one can simply order online a teacher's supply list. We need to explore cost-saving opportunities by partnering with other districts to purchase supplies and equipment in bulk.</p> | <p>Data shows that sleep deprived high school students would benefit academically and emotionally from later start times. But, it can also cause issues with the scheduling of all extra-curricular activities by pushing these events even later into the day leaving less time for family dinners and completing daily homework assignments. Some students are already missing valuable class time to travel for away games. Princeton school district proposed later start times last year so we should reach out to their BOE. I have experience in writing resolutions and if this is something the district wanted, I would work to get later start times across the state. Scheduling of school events should always take schedules of working parents into consideration so that they do not miss out on opportunities to support their child. I'm in favor of kids learning new classroom assignments at the end of the school year. Kids want to know and it might also provide more opportunities for kids to get together over the summer to promote better relationships before the new school year begins. Class supply lists should be standardized and distributed at the end of the school year, perhaps even through each PTA/PFA. By utilizing technology and creating partnerships with local businesses, there is no reason why this process can't be made easier for today's busy parents and teachers.</p> | <p>There has been plenty of research done to support the benefits of later start times, but the logistical difficulties with a later end of the school day would be something that would need to be planned out properly before I would support such a plan. If it can be done and makes sense for the district, I would certainly consider it. With regards to classroom assignments, supply lists, etc. at the end of the school year, I think the more information we can give parents in advance so they can plan accordingly, the better. The district has done a fantastic job of being more transparent with regards to the happenings in the classroom, but we can certainly continue to improve on that.</p> |

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| <p>What are your thoughts on inclusion and the current tiers of support in the District, including self-contained classes. Please feel to cite research.</p> | <p>I believe in inclusion, and in-class-support. Inclusion can benefit all students in a classroom. We should focus on the individual needs of each student and do our best to provide whatever environment works best for each student, with the hope that he or she is always working toward his or her least restrictive environment.</p> | <p>Every single student, with or without special needs including but not limited to intellectual disabilities ("ID"), is unique and should be treated as such. The goal should be inclusion, as per IDEA. Although mainstreaming is an appealing and inclusive approach it does have both advantages and disadvantages; this is entirely dependent upon the special needs and/or IDs of the student. Mainstreaming provides a natural, real-world environment where important life skills can be obtained. Full mainstreaming however might not be appropriate to provide the best learning experience for some children with special needs. There are many children with special needs and/or IDs who may best be served by spending some time in a mainstreamed classroom and additional time in a resource room where they can receive more individualized attention. By using a combination of the mainstream classroom and individualized time model, children with special needs and/or IDs benefit from the exposure to mainstream students but also receive the attention they need for their specific challenges. Overall several studies have suggested that "including disabled children in mainstream classrooms improves academic achievement, self-esteem and social skills." We must guard against placing a special needs child in a mainstream environment if that child is to get easily lost. It is ... imperative "that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) be developed for each special needs child to help them find the balance between regular classroom exposure and getting the attention each requires."</p> <p>"The Choice of Educational Settings: The Pros and Cons of Mainstreaming Children with Intellectual Disabilities" - Tammy Reynolds, BA., C.E. Zupanick, PSY.D. & Mark Dombeck, PH.D.</p> <p>"Mainstreaming Special Education in the Classroom" -The Room 241 Team (February 20, 2018)Concordia University</p> | <p>IDEA requires that all students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. IDEA guidelines also caution against removing a child from the classroom if at all possible, even if modifications to the general curriculum are necessary for that child. (National Council on Disability, <i>The Segregation of Students with Disabilities</i>, Feb. 2018). As per njleftbehind.org, NJ has one of the lowest rates of inclusion of diverse learners in classrooms across the country. Clearly we need to do better, and perhaps one approach to improve this would be to acknowledge our own bias as to the potential of these children. Studies show that many children have only mild to moderate disabilities, and yet they are constantly segregated from their peers. Self-contained classrooms, although necessary in some circumstances, should only be used as a last resort. We should be providing more in classroom support to children, where they can still learn alongside their peers. If necessary, the child could be pulled out of the classroom for reading and math. Another variation is to have the child mainstreamed in classes with support from a special education teacher who can made modifications to the curriculum. Child study teams play an important role, but so do the parents. The parents' input as to level of instruction and programming that they would like to see for their child must be valued.</p> | <p>I am all for inclusion in the classroom as long as it benefits the child. I think a blanket statement on a topic like that is difficult to agree to because every child's needs are different.</p> |

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| <p>How would you work to address safety in the schools, particularly in regard to mental health?</p> | <p>I believe we need to provide more mental health services in our schools. The district is already moving in the direction of training more staff to recognize issues that could be related to mental health. I would support any recommendation to provide additional service to our students in this matter.</p> | <p>This is a topic that warrants our full attention and I will dedicate myself to studying school safety, both pro-active preventive and intervention measures. I will listen to the concerns of the students, teachers, administration, experts and parents.</p> <p>Our children are stressed and we should work towards providing a “climate of safety” with discussions on safety and security no matter the grade level. The guidance counselors need to be trained in detecting and understanding “warning signs” displayed by a student who may be in need of help. Guidance counselors should strive for a relationship of trust and confidence with their students so they can comfortably discuss matters when they are feeling pressured, anxious, lost, bullied, harassed and/or mistreated, etc. Students should also be able to share on a confidential basis with school staff when they sense that someone within the community may be harboring thoughts of doing harm to themselves and/or others. This would be akin to a “tip line” which has been very successful in the law enforcement field. I believe we should not unless necessary, place our students in an environment of increased police presence because that elevates anxiety and distress. There are other options to consider to enhance school safety without impacting a students’ comfort level, such as installing a 2nd locking door in schools where one is not already present, retrofitting existing entrances to create “man traps”, repairing and/or installing additional surveillance cameras, etc.</p> | <p>I was pleased to hear at the Oct. 17th meeting about the new mental health professional networks rolling out across the district to provide mental health wellness and support programming directed at grades 9-12. There will also be an age appropriate focus on grades 5-6 to make younger students more familiar with the subject of mental illness, symptoms, and how to ask for help. This type of proactive programming is crucial and will assist in making the schools a safer environment as data has shown the following: 1) almost every incident of true violence in the schools is precipitated by some form/degree of mental illness that had already been manifesting in the student; 2) missed opportunities to identify issues due to budgets cuts, diverting money from more holistic safety-focused programming; 3) students and their peers feeling isolated from seeking assistance due to stigma that still persists about mental illness; and 4) how early intervention is key both for the child’s current well-being and ability to progress in life, as well as the safety of fellow students. I would like to see programming enhanced in the future, and perhaps even holistic programming for families, too. BOE should work closely with John Maguire, head of security for the district, and the Middletown Police Department.</p> | <p>Mental health is really one the foundations of school safety as we have seen a clear link between mental health, bullying and peer rejection and someone who would do the unspeakable in a school. The district has clearly taken this topic on with a large push for mental health. I would like to see this course of action continue so that we can make sure everyone is in a safe learning environment.</p> |

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| <p>How would you work to assure consistent policy enforcement in the district? If you believe different policies should exist for individual schools, should they be changed to meet the needs of students throughout the district?</p> | <p>The Board makes policy and the administration enforces it. The Board can hold the Superintendent accountable for the enforcement via his annual review. I believe polices need to be the same for every school. However, there are times when administration should have the right to use discretion in the enforcement of a particular policy as it applies to a given situation.</p> | <p>I do not endorse having diverse policies for different schools as that will result in a disparate treatment of students and faculty. There is a clear distinction between “policy” and “regulation” (enforcement). It is the responsibility of the Board of Education to adopt policies which are to be followed evenly throughout the district. Once the Board adopts a policy it is thereafter incumbent upon the superintendent and other administrators to develop “regulations” to carry out the Board’s policy. It is not the role of the Board to ensure that the policies are followed; that responsibility falls squarely upon the superintendent and those who work under his supervision. A vast majority of the policies adopted by the BOE are mandated by the state. If the Board’s policy and the regulations promulgated to carry out that policy are not being followed, the Board has the authority to either change that policy and/or insist that the policy be carried out as intended by the Board. All 17 schools throughout the district should be treated the same at all times.</p> | <p>Middletown schools need uniformity. The BOE must work with the administration to ensure that all students are being afforded the same opportunities across the district. The only way to achieve this is through uniform policies that apply to all 17 schools. The BOE should ensure that all curriculum and other programming opportunities exist for students in every school, regardless of what elementary, middle, or high school they attend. If elected, I would work with the superintendent and president of each PTA/PFA to begin exploring what is happening across the district. I would then find ways to formulate and report on this data to explore possible solutions to bring all schools in line.</p> | <p>Across Middletown’s 17 schools, we have consistent curriculum across elementary, middle and high schools, so naturally policies should consistent as well. I believe in consistency, but not rigidity, so if someone came to the board with a specific policy that had an impact on their school we could certainly discuss it. It would not benefit anyone to evaluate certain policies as long as there was a direct impact on a school where there is an immediate need.</p> |

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| <p>Do you feel our BOE has a good working relationship with our township committee? If not, what will you do to help facilitate that relationship?</p> | <p>The relationship between the BOE and the township committee can always be improved. That's why the Board has set a goal to "continue to work with the township to enhance shared services and shared projects."</p> | <p>I am not a member of Middletown's Board of Education so I cannot comment as to whether or not the BOE has a good working relationship with the Township's Committee. Approximately 70% of the Township's taxpayer dollars are earmarked for educational needs. The remaining 30% is remitted to the state and to the Township. I think it is critical to work collaboratively with the Township towards a common goal, in a way that makes fiscal sense. My objective will always be to make it a win-win situation for both the Township and the district. I have no ego as for me it is never a zero sum game. I will always advocate for what is in the best interest of our students. I can work with anybody and deliver my position in a way which makes it well received. I have over the course of my career mediated hundreds of matters quite successfully; it is part and parcel of my training, my life experience and it is a role that I enjoy.</p> | <p>I'm not currently on the Board so it's difficult for me to say whether or not there is a good relationship between both parties. The September BOE meeting seemed to indicate that there might be some tension. Regardless, it is important that a good working relationship exists between the two. There are many areas of the budget that could benefit from a real shared services agreement that actually results in the Township taking over some of the expenses and lifting that burden from the school budget. For example, security in the schools, revitalizing of the already permitted sports fields, retrofitting of existing facilities to bring them into "green" compliance, etc. Such agreements would benefit the children of the district and the taxpayers immensely and free up needed money for educational needs. If elected, I would immediately familiarize myself with the issues discussed during the joint meetings. I would also reach out to the TC to introduce myself. I have been part of, and chaired, many coalitions over the years. I know how to work well with others and build consensus toward a common goal.</p> | <p>I feel that the BOE and the Township Committee work together and things get done. My sense is that the relationship needs improvement and would hope to be part of that. The Share Services Committee is one of the most important committees that the BOE has and that is something I would welcome being a part of. I don't believe that politics have anything to do with a BOE seat and it would not matter what political affiliation was sitting across the table from me on the Township Committee side. I also believe that the relationship could improve by have a rotation of BOE members attend TC meetings and vice versa. If one member from each side attended corresponding voting meeting, some great input could be shared and greater communication can be shown to the public.</p> |

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| <p>How many BOE meetings have you attended in the past year? What do you think our district is doing well? What is the most pressing issue that we need to address, and what process would you propose to address it? What is your understanding of the (volunteer) BOE's role vs. the (paid) Administration's role?</p> | <p>+ I have not missed a meeting this year.</p> <p>+ Our district (all 17 schools) was just recognized as being "Future Ready." We excel in the area of technology. We have increased offerings at the high school, and created new courses at the middle school, and increased safety at the elementary school. We also offer many dual enrollments allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school.</p> <p>+ Overcrowding & finances are our most pressing issues. As I have already mentioned, we need to open up the strategic plan to get both public and professional input to address overcrowding. With regards to funding, the district has to constantly reevaluate all of its programs and staffing. I believe the Board and the community need to advocate more on the state level for appropriate funding for our district, and seek additional sources of grant income.</p> <p>+ The Board oversees the district, but is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the schools. That is the job of administration.</p> | <p>With the exception of the October 16th meeting, I have attended every single meeting since being a candidate. I have spent my professional career providing legal counsel to boards of trustees, guiding and assisting them as they navigate some very challenging issues. I have always reminded the Boards that I work with as to their fiduciary responsibilities to those that have elected them and that every single decision they make should be in the best interest of the people they represent. I have watched many BOE meetings online in order to educate myself as to the history and current status of some of the issues before the BOE. Our district has been successful in improving the curriculum by implementing successful piloting programs such as the reader and writers workshops. The "Arts Academy" is another shining example of how we have expanded opportunities for our students. We have encouraged students learning history and social sciences to think "in a critical fashion" and we have succeeded in implementing "student directed learning." We have redirected our curriculum to focus on "soft skills," such as how you treat others: respect, dignity and inclusiveness.</p> <p>The most pressing issue faced by the district are the budget cuts, the opioid epidemic, vaping and juuling.</p> <p>The Township is profoundly diverse and that diversity generates a range of differing challenges.</p> <p>With respect to the BOE's role versus the paid administration's role: the Board adopts policy which the administration implements via regulations that it creates. The responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of the Board's policy falls upon the superintendent and those that work under the superintendent's supervision.</p> | <p>I have been attending BOE meetings since May. However, I have been watching the recordings over the past year, despite the poor sound quality, to familiarize myself with what is happening across the district, outside of my son's school community at Bayview. The role of the BOE is to create policies and regulations to be applied equally across the district. The BOE is also responsible for negotiating collective bargaining agreements, overseeing facilities, overseeing curriculum, adopting the operating budget, and employing the superintendent. It is the Administration's role to oversee daily operations and to enact the policies set forth by the BOE. One area of focus that seems to be progressing well is the new mental health professional network that I addressed above. The most pressing issue facing the district is the \$1.2 million budget cut for this year and the projected \$6.2 million dollar deficit over the next seven years if the current funding formula is not modified. The district will not be able to sustain such drastic cuts and still provide an exceptional education to students. On Oct. 12th, Brick Township BOE voted to join a growing number of districts that are preparing to sue the State Commissioner of Education. Toms River did the same on Oct. 17th. We need to reach out to those districts asap. We should also be forming a coalition with all neighboring districts to lobby Trenton together, rather than continuing to fight alone.</p> | <p>I have attended almost all of the BOE voting meetings as well as a handful of workshop meetings over the past two years. I think our district has done a great job of continuing to improve the education environment our students are in as well as incorporate technology into that strategy. Our test scores and overall school rankings continue to improve and I would like to see that stay as a great accomplishment year after year. I would like to see more community involvement with the BOE. Meeting attendance is always low and the board is trying to get more feedback from parents and students, but that needs to improve. With regards to meeting attendance, I think it would go a long way to parents for the public sessions of meetings to start on time. Right now, meetings sometimes don't start till after 8:30pm when they were scheduled to start at 8pm, which only frustrates people attending. I would also like to see a more comprehensive survey system that gathers data from parents, current students and alumni to see how prepared they were for the next chapters of life of their education. My understanding with regards to the BOE's role vs the administration is that the BOE is the governing body that discusses or implements policy that has been presented by the administration.</p> |

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| <p>Bullying and given the current climate would you support changes to current HIB policy to reflect sexual harassment?</p> | <p>There are already policies that specifically address sexual harassment. I would have to review any specific proposed changes to determine if I would support them.</p> | <p>It is my understanding that the current BOE Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Policy (“HIB”) does include sexual harassment. It falls directly under the umbrella of HIB. It should be noted that the Board’s HIB policy and the regulations adopted and implemented by the administration regarding HIB are completely in line with that which has been mandated by the state. An allegation of an incident which triggers the initiation of the HIB protocols is to be investigated within a certain timeframe and thereafter the procedures in place and possible consequences for the student(s) responsible for the violation under the policy are followed. It should be noted that the victim of a HIB violation does not have the right to know what the consequences are for the student(s) that has/have committed the violation. The student that is found to have committed the violation is entitled to a right of privacy under the law/policy.</p> | <p>I believe the current anti-bullying law already includes an element of sexual harassment in compliance with State guidelines. If the statute were otherwise, I would support changes to the current HIB policy to include it. Sexual harassment is pervasive in our society and can easily occur within the schools. There is criteria that must be met for an incident to fall under the State’s guidelines. Even if an incident was determined not be in violation of the HIB policy, it would still be considered an offense under the school’s Code of Conduct that could result in consequences for the offender. Sometimes I think there is frustration on the part of the victim’s family in thinking that no action is being taken against the offender, but we must remember that all discipline matters are confidential, especially those involving minors. I would work to make sure that reported HIB incidents or Code of Conduct incidents are being dealt with appropriately by the administration.</p> | <p>I would absolutely support a policy change that would include sexual harassment to the HIB policy. Every child should be free to attend school knowing that they are being protected not just from traditional bullying, but also sexual harassment.</p> |

| Candidate: | Joan Minnuies | Tom Giaimo | Deborah Wright | David Mercus |
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| <p>What topic involving our schools are you most passionate about? What is your stance on this topic and what are your ideas on how the district can improve in this area?</p> | <p>I want to see each student be provided with the opportunities to be the best they can be. I think we have made great strides in this area and I want to see this continue. To improve, I think we should do more outreach to former students, staff and parents to get feedback on what they think we did right and what needs to change.</p> | <p>The topics that I am most passionate about are equity and mental health. I will advocate for equity & accessibility to all educational and vocational opportunities for every single student in Middletown. I am where I am today based upon the sacrifices made by my parents to present me with educational opportunities that others did not have. I am optimistic that we can incorporate into each school's curriculum instructional classes which will provide our students with skills to deal with the challenges they face every day, challenges that none of us faced when we were in school. A child's resort to alcohol/drug abuse and suicide contemplation comes at the end of an evolving mental health crisis. We need to take more of a pro-active and interventionist approach and provide our children with the help and guidance required to make good choices in life. We need to begin a dialogue with our youth at a very early stage in their education so that they are equipped to deal with harassment, bullying, intimidation, peer pressure, anxiety, depression, anger and feelings of loneliness. We must do a better job...this is our moral and social responsibility to our children...and this is what I will commit to, as a member of the Middletown BOE.</p> | <p>Based on my professional background in Mental Health Law, I am passionate about mental health and would work towards improving and enhancing holistic mental health wellness programming throughout the district. I am also passionate about vocational training and am dismayed at how little vocational training exists in our schools. As a society, we need to accept the fact that college is not for every student. Too many students are proceeding on to college, dropping out, or even graduating with absolutely no idea of what career they would like to pursue. They become demoralized and are strapped with high amounts of educational debt. We should be reaching out to the many local unions in the area and creating pathways for apprenticeships. Even though we need to keep our curriculum current to educate the students on the needs of a 21st century workforce, we also still need people who know how to build houses, buildings, and bridges; fix cars; install electrical wires, etc. We need to create additional pathways for students to excel into jobs that are as equally important. We also need to offer practical life skill classes like resume workshops and how to interview for a job.</p> | <p>I am most passionate about making sure that our children have a safe and efficient learning environment each and every day. When we drop our kids off to school, we are expecting that this is the case each day and this parental and student expectation is something that I take very seriously. School safety is an important topic right now and I don't believe that school safety is something that is strictly referring to armed security, but believe that it starts early on with proper mental health involvement as well as infrastructure changes to our schools. The district has done a great job taking the mental health issue head on and I would support the continuation of that. The infrastructure issue is one that is going to be difficult to work around considering state aid cuts and the age of some of our schools. The districts head of security has done a great job starting the process and continuing these changes now and in the future.</p> |