

**League of Women Voters of Teaneck
2022 VOTERS GUIDE
Teaneck Board of Education**

Our voters' guide questionnaire and letter of invitation to the Candidates' Forum, sponsored by LWV Teaneck, was mailed to each of the candidates for Teaneck Board of Education in early August. In addition to asking them about their Teaneck residency, occupation, education, family & community involvement, we asked each candidate to answer the following questions and to limit their answers to a total of 500 words or less:

- 1. Given the current search for a new superintendent, what criteria would you suggest the Board prioritize as they review the candidates?*
- 2. Give 1-2 specific examples of the instructional strengths in our school district and also any constructive suggestions for improvement in student performance.*

The candidates' responses follow unedited, and are in the order received:

David Gruber, 4 Myron Court

Years residing in Teaneck: 30

Occupation: Consultant

Education: BS, CCNY; MD, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine; MBA, Columbia Graduate School of Business

Family: Wife, four children – Ben, Ali, Jesse and Max

Record of Community Involvement:

- Board member (former) – Congregation Netivot Shalom
- Teaneck BOE Trustee (2 terms)

1. The most important decision of a BOE is selecting the right superintendent. Much can be learned from the prior experience with Dr. Irving. Suggested criteria include:

- Experience (past performance)
- Leadership.
- Strategic planning.
- Voice of the student and stakeholders.
- Faculty/staff engagement
- Information management
- Learning environment.
- Performance management.

The criteria do not occur in a vacuum; aspirational goals and baseline performance

require articulation by the Board of Education to provide context. Student success is paramount.

2. Instructional strengths

Strong curriculum development department responsible for instructional materials used in the classroom. The curriculum development process should be one of continuous improvement with the identification of specific goals and benchmarks. It must be aligned with New Jersey state mandates.

Suggestions for improvement

Every 4 years for the past 40 years, our nation has been evaluated on Mathematics and Science education in grades 4, 8 and 12. Each year, despite being advanced technologically, our country falls near the bottom. (TIMSS). Math/Science education must improve. This can be done by:

1. Improving problem solving skills. Research shows, in the U.S., teachers teach procedures (mechanics) versus problem solving/thinking and teaching for understanding.
2. Creating an environment of vertical learning in the classroom.
3. Raising expectations
4. The district's goal is to try to build equity, versus equality. Meaning, instead of having single periods for Math and Science, it may be beneficial to have 1.5 periods a day or seven periods a week
5. More to be spent on staff development

Denise Sanders, 31 Genesee Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: more than 40 years

Occupation: Special education evaluator & therapist

Education: * Proud graduate of the Teaneck school district * M.A. in Education from New York University * M.S. in Assistive Technology from Mercy College * B.S. from Northeastern University in Speech Pathology and Audiology

Family: Married with two children, both graduated from the Teaneck Public Schools

Record of Community Involvement:

- Co-President of PTO at Lowell and Bryant Schools.
- Chairperson for the Building Quality Maintenance Committee at Thomas Jefferson Middle School. And Co-Chair at the Teaneck Public Schools.
- Volunteer Parent for THS Project Graduation Committee
- Member of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc. (a Public Service Organization)
- Backpack Give-A-Ways with the NAACP

1. As this important search is underway for a new superintendent, I would suggest the priority be on a candidate who can demonstrate having a successful experience as a

superintendent with 4 or more years in one superintendency/position. A candidate whose vita demonstrates a proven skill set of effective decision-making skills, effective and inclusive communications, and a leadership style that promotes accountability, professional improvement and support. The candidate must be able to speak to and give specific examples of successful experiences with the PreK-12 grade population, including students and programs under Special Education.

2. The Teaneck School District has vast opportunities for all of our students to succeed; whether through the Primary Schools, the Middle schools, and the High School in the AP and Honors Program, STEM with our TEAMS program or the College Prep, and The Career Guided Path with our Culinary Arts and our New Digital Video Certification Program. The curriculum in the Teaneck School District gives our students a wealth of options to learn and exceed all standards. Our students have the opportunity to take advantage of enriched academic programs which provide them with the skills and knowledge to explore and grow with confidence so that they desire to become lifelong learners. Additionally, the support and enrichment that we have provided to our students in our summer programs serves to further develop the skill sets of our students with advanced knowledge, those needing intervention resources, as well as our students who are typically developing.

Last, it is essential that we maintain small class sizes, which research supports, to afford students and teachers increased engagement of instructional interactions between peer to peer and student to teacher. Researched based instructional “best practices” is the key to providing a rigorous curriculum that will prepare all our students for this 21st Century global world.

Katie Geffert Schneider, 1143 Julia Street

Years residing in Teaneck: 36 years total; 12 since 2010

Occupation: Retail Manager

Education: BA Psychology Fairfield University; MA Counseling New York University

Family: Husband – Rich, married 22 years

Two children - Son, Callum: Freshman at Penn State University & Teaneck High School Graduate 2022, attended Hawthorne & Thomas Jefferson Middle School.

Daughter, Margaret: Senior at Bergen County Academies, attended Bryant School, Hawthorne, and TJMS.

Record of Community Involvement:

- PTO Hawthorne School 2011-2015
- Served as Secretary; Faith Formation Teacher St. Anastasia’s 2010-2018
- Member of PTAs at TJ and THS.

- Additional Community experience: High School Guidance Counselor in Chicago Public Schools; Area Director for Explore, Inc. after school program; Teen Parent Social Worker for Arapahoe County, Colorado; Volunteer for orphanage in Tepatitlan, Mexico.

1. An optimal candidate will have proven, influential experience in a complex school district. Teaneck's strength is in our diversity, and the right candidate will be open to the expertise of our town's educators and administrators, while still setting a vision with clear goals for our students. An ideal superintendent will have the ability to successfully navigate the competing priorities of the school board, administrators, teachers, parents, students and community as a whole while keeping what's best for our students at the forefront of their decision making.

2. TAG (Teaneck Academically Gifted Program); and TEAMS (Technology-Enriched Academy for Mathematics and Science). Both programs I consider strengths as they promote curiosity, encourage the pursuit of learning, and challenge children in their thought processes, resulting in curating a creative mind. Creativity, an indicator of a passionate learner, leads to innovation.

Graduation rate is what defines a school district as successful. Teaneck High School has 93% graduation rate – currently below state median. We need to improve this, and we must listen to our district educators (i.e. the people who know our children best), hearing their insights on what our students truly need to attain a diploma, and supporting them by alleviating barriers. As a board, we must hold ourselves accountable to responsibly provide the district, and therefore the superintendent, the resources, direction and guidance to realize a path forward to continued success.

Sebastian Rodriguez, 533 Sagamore Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 21 years

Occupation: Teacher Bilingual Ed (NYC Department of Education)

Education: M.S. Childhood Education; M.S. Non Profit Management; B.A. Athletic Administration

Family: Married with 2 children, both graduated from the Teaneck Public Schools

Record of Community Involvement:

- Teaneck BoE (15 years)
- Co-Founder Resource Education Awareness by Latinos (R.E.A.L), (12 years)
- Board member Bergen YMCA (Board - 6 years)
- Board member and coach, Teaneck Southern Little League (8 years)
- Co-Founder- Youth Education Sports and Society (Y.E.S.S.) Youth Flag Football League (5 years)
- Board Member Acelero Learning/Head Start (4 years)

1. My criteria includes finding a superintendent who is a strong educational leader with experience, someone who prioritizes the use of data to make sound educational and financial decisions, someone who is able to assess the current administrative staff to identify strong educational leaders within the district and finally someone who consistently sustains a shared mission, vision and core values in a manner that includes all district stakeholders and has a strong positive impact on student achievement.

2. The district designs, implements and delivers a core curriculum that fulfills the district's mission to serve each student's unique learning requirements. For example, on L.A. Literature and informational (nonfiction) text are important for our students and should maintain their rightful place in our classrooms.

While in math, classroom talk and discussion are critical components for deeply understanding and sharing their thinking and engaging in reasoning alongside others; I think that carefully taught, the assignments can help make math more concrete. For example, students should not just memorize their times tables, and addition facts but also understand how arithmetic works and how to apply it to real-life situations.

One of the recommendations I have to continue to support the development and implementing on instruction that is based on formative assessments which ground instructional practice, pacing and learning;

- Promoting deep learning of mathematics by focusing on developing and understanding of concepts and procedures through problem solving, reasoning, and dialogue;
- Classroom talk and discussion are critical components for deeply understanding and sharing their thinking and engaging in reasoning alongside others;
- Access to high-quality tasks and purposeful questions that
 - elicit student thinking
 - allow students to connect representations
 - explain mathematical reasoning.

Edward Ha, 589 Tilden Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 18 years

Occupation: Director Performance and Attribution, Wilmington Trust

Education: MBA in Finance, NYU Stern School of Business

Masters in Mechanical Engineering, CU Boulder

B.S. in Thermo-Energetics and Propulsion, INSA Rouen, France.

Family: Married, two children

Record of Community Involvement:

- PTO Treasurer at BFMS, 2017-2019

- TOPS President, 2018-2020
- PTA Council President, 2020-Present
- PTA Co-President at BFMS, 2022-Present
- Math Volunteer at Math Adventures and Word Play
- CFA Institute, Volunteer Grader

1. We need someone who:

- Understands the field of education.
- Can articulate, through concrete metrics, a vision on how they will transform our school into a Blue Ribbon School District
- A communicator, a motivator and listener who understands the needs of our students, and can work collaboratively with the Board, school administration, the parents, and the Teaneck Township as a whole.

2.. The middle school offers very interesting classes that have helped my children grow.

- * **Odyssey of the Mind** is a class they took in seventh grade. The creativity, freedom of expression, and critical thinking of this class allowed them to do so many things, such as write a mini play, or build a chair out of newspaper.
- The **Global Concerns** class made them more empathetic future citizens, and much more aware of the world and the importance of sustainability. This class helped mold my daughter into the advocate she is now.

In high school:

- AP Calculus AB AND BC (trigonometry, series...)
- Creative Writing.
- The school's staff is supportive and very accommodating to mental health.
- The 3-day retreat in Pennsylvania for peer leaders as a way to bond between themselves and train them for this new responsibility of being leaders to the new freshmen class.
- The Rutgers Oncology Olympiad at Teaneck High School

In terms of improvements:

- The school needs to create more educational field trips to solidify learning and support important academic concepts.
- The art classes should go visit museums, many of whom are in New York City.
- The core classes should take trips to meet professionals and visit real world businesses, laboratories, or manufacturing plants.
- Internships should be offered for high school students to get real world experience in business firms, hospitals, schools etc.
- Students should be able to go and do student exchanges in other countries.
- The school should provide stronger before and after-school "kumon" style programs in Math and English

Naveed Ahmad, 172 Hillside Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 7 years

Occupation: Director of Student Life, Columbia School of Nursing

Education: MBA, Long Island University; BA, Hunter College

Family: Wife – Jennifer; Daughter – Anouk (5); Son – Arbor (4)

Record of Community Service:

- Bryant School PTO – current member
- TCSCO – current member

1. I would advise the Board to seek candidates that:

- Have a history of strong leadership – the superintendent should have the ability to build partnerships with parents, teachers, administration, and the Board to create and execute a shared vision that best serves Teaneck’s students.
- Have a track record of measurable student improvement – the superintendent should be current in strategies to boost student success and adapt to the changing needs of our students.
- Understand instructional & teaching methods – the superintendent should have a keen understanding of the learning models and pedagogies Teaneck uses throughout its schools in order to better support our teachers.
- Communicate effectively – the superintendent must be consistent and transparent in communicating our school district’s progress and achievements.
- Be passionate about serving Teaneck’s diverse group of students – the superintendent should be motivated by what makes our community so wonderful and unique, our diversity, and understand the challenges in meeting the wide range of needs of our students.

2. As a parent of two young children, I am an advocate for early childhood education. I believe an effective education encourages independence and develops critical thinking skills. This is why I believe a strength of Teaneck’s school system’s is its expansion of Pre-K. Children benefit from the structure and social interaction of preschool, leading to greater future educational success. I also believe that financial literacy is a key competency that all students should possess. As it stands, financial literacy is a requirement for Teaneck High School, and it is an important one, but I do think that students should be introduced to basic concepts as early as elementary school. These skills help form life-long positive habits around money management. Additionally, we know that bright students may have difficulty as test-takers. Students preparing for college would benefit from expanded district-provided SAT prep courses to boost test-taking strategies.

Clara Williams, 21 Stuyvesant Road

Years residing in Teaneck: 50+ years

Occupation: Accountant

Education: Master of Administrative Science, Fairleigh Dickinson University
BS in Accounting, New York University
Diploma: Teaneck High School

Family: Married with two adult sons

Record of Community Involvement:

- Teaneck Board of Education, Trustee (2011-2020),(Appointed July 2022-Present)
- Former Vice President, Teaneck Board of Education
- Former Vice President, Bergen County School Boards Association
- Former Board of Director, New Jersey School Boards Association
- Former Advisory Board on Community Relations - Teaneck Council
- Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday/Monument Committee, Member
- NAACP

1. The Board should consider the following criteria:

- A leader who is a culturally competent and is an experienced Pre-K thru 12 educator, administrator, and superintendent.
- A leader who can effectively address learning loss, institute a plan to address our student opportunity gap and uplift our talented and gifted students.
- A leader who can motivate and elevate the morale and professionalism Of teachers, administrators, and staff.
- A leader who has experience and an innovative track record with Special needs students and families.
- A leader who can foster a social, emotional learning environment and create a positive school climate for students and parents.
- A leader who has successfully handled district level school funding, budgeting, safety, personnel retention/recruitment, and facility maintenance.

2. (a) Establishing a Pre-Kindergarten program is a notable example of one of the numerous instructional strengths of the district. It is a well-established fact that exposure to positive early childhood education yields results in later years. These children are more likely to develop skills that prepare them for the vigorous curriculum they will encounter in elementary, intermediate, and high school. Moreover, these children may develop an appreciation for lifelong learning and they should be more readily prepared for 21st century vocations.

(b) Expanding honor classes in middle schools could result in an increase in students taking honor classes in high school. Earlier exposure to AP classes better positions the middle school student to succeed in high school honors classes.

Kassandra Reyes, 550 Grant Terrace

Years residing in Teaneck: 9 years

Occupation: New York State Certified School Counselor

Education: Fordham University, B.S Business Administration
CUNY, M.S. Education, Bilingual Extension
CUNY, M.S. Education Counselor Education

Family: Husband, Omar; sisters Kelly & Rachel are Teaneck residents;
nephew & nieces attending Teaneck High School

Record of Community Involvement:

- Active with St. Joseph's Parish
- Meals with a Mission
- Mentoring with Bergen Volunteers

1. The Board should prioritize the amount of experience the new superintendent has in educational settings. I strongly believe a superintendent should have demonstrated levels of experience in order to truly lead the district. First, a foundation in classroom experience and next, holding a leadership position within education is key to understanding educational dynamics. Additionally, the Board should seek an innovative, compassionate, transparent leader who will put STUDENT INTERESTS' FIRST!

2. One of the instructional strengths in Teaneck Public Schools is providing PreK for all students. It is essential to provide quality early education to lay a strong foundation for future success. Additionally, the district-wide launch of a universal K -12 screener serves as an important tool in ensuring (educational?) equity amongst students. By screening students early and often, educators can provide appropriate interventions and modify curriculum as needed by creating small group interventions in ELA & Math. As Equity For All is part of *Achieving Excellence Together's* platform, we understand the importance of providing individualized educational experiences for all students.

Another instructional strength of Teaneck Public Schools is the creation of an enrichment-focused, project-based learning track for eighth grade students. I believe hands-on and enrichment projects are vital to spark student motivation. Teaneck Board of Education offers a diverse variety of such projects and enrichment activities. One example is the long list of AP classes offered including US History, Psychology and Human Geography, that my nieces have raved so much about. AP courses are fundamental in developing a student's complex thinking skills and benefit their potential collegiate career. Furthermore, language classes are offered for both native speakers and new language learners, which have been shown to increase memory building, mental flexibility, and problem-solving skills. Lastly, the variety of clubs offered such as Astrology, HEAL (a women's empowerment group), Theater, SOLA (Student Organization for Latino Americans) and yearbook are all great examples of enriching,

motivating activities that also happen to align with *Achieving Excellence Together's* platform: Redefining the School Experience.

Having all stakeholders, families, teachers, administrators and the Board collaborate together to select curriculum is another instructional strength of Teaneck Public Schools. It is vital for all stakeholders to be vested and aware of the instructional curriculum. The recent adoption of the new NJDOE Health standards is a great example of a thoughtful and collaborative approach to curriculum.

During my outreach with community members, a suggested area of improvement has been more frequent and clearer communication with families. Additionally, I have heard from students and families who wish to see more sports teams and enrichment opportunities in middle school. I believe it is crucial to engage youth in activities beyond academics in all educational levels.

Lori Bullock, 130 Herrick Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 48 years

Occupation: SVP, Executive Producer – Digitas Health Advertising Agency

Education: Attended Eugene Field ES, BF Junior High and Teaneck HS;
St. John's University, B.S. Communication

Family: Armstead & Alice Bullock (parents, Teaneck residents); Brett & Angeline Bullock (Teaneck residents); 2 nieces and 1 nephew that are graduates of TJ Junior High and Teaneck HS)

Record of Community Involvement:

- Supporter and Donor of First Baptist Church of Teaneck's annual clothing drive
- Phone bank volunteer (DNC) for district congressional races
- Active supporter of Teaneck exercise and recreation classes
- Community supporter of local Girl Scout chapter

1. The selection of a Superintendent to head the Teaneck public school system is one of the most important tasks for school board officials. The employment of a nonpartisan, qualified consultant that understands the critical skills and leadership qualifications necessary for the Superintendent position is paramount when conducting the search. It is essential that school board members work together to hire the right consultant that would lead the search while the members agree on policies and the proper curriculum their school system in a fair equitable manner. Given the level of chaos and confusion that has clouded this current school board, it will be of the utmost importance for this upcoming group of elected school board to be attentive and listen to the opinions, wishes and concerns of the community while also maintaining a respectable, proactive relationships with the teachers' union. Lastly, clear communication and cooperation with the local officials and governing bodies in an effort to meet the town, count and state guidelines

and objectives is also of the utmost importance when surveying the criteria needed for this process.

2. Teaneck public school system offers a free Pre-K program to all residents with eligible children between the ages of 3 & 4. Studies show that kids who attend pre-school excel in their emotional development by learning key socialization skills while cultivating a curious mind. These are all positive attributes to their development. Children that are dual language learners also often benefit from Pre-K both in their English language proficiency and in other academic skills. With nearly 41% of Teaneck public school students being of Latin/ Hispanic heritage, our school system is showing great vision by serving this growing community while embracing all children that are part of this diverse village of residents. The greatest strength we have in Teaneck is our diversity and the more we embrace that, the better our core values will be given the fact we were first in the nation to integrate our public school system.

Darryl Greene, 82 Ayers Court #3C

Years residing in Teaneck: 46 years

Occupation: Technology Sales and Producer/Executive Producer for Scripted and Un-Scripted Film and Television Content

Education: Teaneck High School, Pace University

Family: Proud Grandfather. My daughter is married with two children; one graduate of Teaneck HS class of 2020 and the second grandson is a freshman in Teaneck HS

Record of Community Involvement:

- Teaneck Boys and Girls Club
- Member of the Teaneck Planning Board
- 12-year Board Member TCT (Teaneck Comes Together)
- Helped broker arrangement between Christ Episcopal Church & Teaneck Board of Education for the pre-school program
- Initiated June 2021 street naming for Rock and Roll Hall of Fame recipients, The Isley Brothers
- October 2020 street naming on Walraven Drive recognizing one of Teaneck's Oldest Black-Owned Businesses "Bespoke Men's Grooming"
- Co-Founder/Administrator: "You Know You are from Teaneck" social media group
- Summer 2020 Food Distribution at 50 Oakdene Ave in Teaneck
- "Pathways to Healthcare" at HNMC introducing THS students to the health care field.

1.. As a resident of Teaneck for 46 years, I would like to see a superintendent who truly puts the kids and schools first. Teaneck has in the past had a revolving door when it comes to superintendents. The district needs to rebuild trust from the community. We need someone who is home grown who has history in Teaneck and who understands the parents and students. We also need someone who is drama free. We do not need to have a superintendent who has any cloud of doubt hanging over them. We should not be in a rush to hire a superintendent. We should wait until after the election to hire a superintendent. This way the board that hires the superintendent is the board that works with the superintendent.

2. Teaneck has great passionate teachers. I would like to see more support given to helping them build their strengths. As it relates to improving student performance, we should put more resources into affordable after school tutorial and enrichment programs.

Gnesha Shain, 493 Teaneck Road

Years residing in Teaneck: 7 years

Occupation: Manager, Avalera

Education: some college

Family: Yuri Miller – Husband; Leah Shain – Daughter (19); Moshe Eisemann – Son (16); Chaim Miller – Stepson (13); Nechama Miller – Stepdaughter (11)

Record of Community Involvement:

- Mother to Teaneck High School graduate of 2021;
- Worked and volunteered for a special needs school in Central NJ for 5+ years.
- Volunteered at our local synagogue during holiday events

1.. Someone who will prioritize the needs of the students, with exceptional interpersonal skills to facilitate a working relationship with each parent. An individual who will be mindful of the district's diverse culture and understands the true meaning of equality. The superintendent should have a strong understanding of advancing each child's education and prioritize family values. This not only applies to the school environment but also all interactions with the community. They must be an innovative individual and be capable of dealing with day-to-day responsibilities while being mindful of the school budget, the taxpayers' money.

2.. Regarding instructional strengths, a stronger curriculum in reading, writing and arithmetic along with balanced extra curriculum activity, i.e., gym, home economics, etc. would benefit the local youth in preparation for their futures. While many of the children are currently meeting NJ State standards, we should promote a more advanced and arduous curriculum. Good is not good enough. We want our children to be exceptional.

Michael Reich, 336 Warwick Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 20 years

Occupation: Attorney

Education: San Rafael CA public schools K-12; BA, California State University at Fullerton (Criminal Justice); University of San Francisco Law School

Family: Married to Devorah Reich; Three children, ages 19, 16 and 12.

Record of Community Involvement: (no details were submitted)

Mr. Reich opted not to answer the two questions.

ELECTION DAY
Tuesday, November 8th
Polls Open 6am-8pm

LWV Candidates Forum, Monday Sept. 19th
Teaneck High School, 7:30pm
3rd Floor Student Center

This VOTERS GUIDE has been prepared by the League of Women Voters of Teaneck, a nonpartisan group of local residents assuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote.

Our local Teaneck league -- which is celebrating our 70th anniversary this year! -- provides opportunities for voter registration each year, works to improve our government, studies local, state and national issues, and strives to engage all citizens in the civic decisions that could impact their lives.