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Meet the School Board Candidates

The School Board election is on May 17th, from noon til 9pm. There will be six candidates on your ballot. I asked each of these candidates to answer a simple set of questions. I hope that this helps you to make your choices before you vote on May 17th. I am grateful to the candidates for taking time off the campaign trail to answer these questions. Candidates are presented in a random order.

Check Your Registration and Polling Location & Plan to Vote on May 17th

It's easy to go online and check both your registration and polling location. Just follow the link below.

[Check Your Registration and Polling Location](#)

Tennille Knoop



1. Please tell us about yourself and why you are running for School Board.

As a mother, taxpayer, and community activist, I'm seeking a seat on the Utica City School Board to offer a new voice to the conversation, both as a parent and a proud Utican. For far too long, our schools have undeservedly received a less than stellar reputation. My intention in running is to bring about change that will help repair and restore that reputation to its rightful place of pride and excellence. I've served as President of Albany Elementary's PTO for six years and have been involved for nine years. During this time I've implemented fundraising programs that enabled students to take field trips outside of the area, introduced educational programs, purchased classroom material, including tables and chairs for students, and maintained two scholarship funds for Proctor High School graduates. These contributions to our school could never have been made without working closely with parents, learning about our students' varied cultures and belief systems, and listening to everyone's ideas so that we could create a body that reflects the best interests of all. I'm looking to bring the same approach and mindset to the school board.

2. Explain what you take to be the appropriate relationship between the School Board and the Superintendent.

School board members play a major role in setting the direction of the district so that the highest student performance can be achieved. This requires rigorous accountability, open communication with the community, and addressing critical education issues, particularly when students do not receive the proper resources directed by the State of New York. When school board members fail to address these standards, and lack community and parent involvement, which

severely impacts student achievement, they've failed not only their elected roles, but also our students, faculty, and community.

3. What role should parents and teachers have in developing school policies?

School policies are expected to keep our students safe while ensuring they receive a quality education. I believe parents and teachers need a seat at the table in order to collaborate and develop a strong curriculum that works for everyone. We must avoid another situation as we had with common core, where a curriculum was force-fed to parents. It created a backlash within our school system and significantly affected students' educational development.

Whether it's students, parents, or staff – we all need to have a crystal clear understanding of the rules in order to make sure all parties involved know what to expect. While teaching styles and classroom rules may differ among teachers and grade levels, the basic guidelines should be consistent and, above all, collaborative. We simply can't ignore our strongest asset: teachers.

4. What is one specific challenge that you believe our schools are facing and how should we address it?

Safety is my number one priority at this moment. Our children should feel safe when they enter their school. They should know who they can turn to when they need help. We have to prioritize available services so they're working effectively for the students and teachers. We need to increase the hours of our security officers and offer them a stronger compensation package so we're able to attract quality personnel. Having the same security staff present five days a week creates relationships with students that engender trust and help ensure feelings of safety and security so crucial to learning.

Follow Tennille Knoop on Facebook

James Paul



1. Please tell us about yourself and why you are running for School Board.

I am a parent, veteran, and youth advocate running because I want our students, teachers, and families to be successful and right now there are challenges where I know I can be part of the solution. I served in the Army for 27 years, 12 of them as an instructor. I have worked with children in an educational setting for over 20 years. As a co-director with the Jr Frontiers, I currently work with students in the district and their families to bring educational opportunities that supplement the education provided to them by the district.

2. Explain what you take to be the appropriate relationship between the School Board and the Superintendent.

The Superintendent is hired by and accountable to the school board as the CEO of the district. Concerns brought by the community and teachers to the board must be conveyed to the superintendent and they work as a team to address them properly and promptly. Feedback is a gift not to be ignored or used to threaten the person who gave it. The superintendent must nurture a

positive relationship with the Utica Teachers Association, staff, and the board so the budget proposal each year reflects investments that benefit the district.

3. What role should parents and teachers have in developing school policies?

I encourage all parents and teachers to play a critical role in developing school policies because their voices matter. There are some policies that are federal and/or state mandates, but anytime there is a district level policy, there needs to be outside input. This creates trust and transparency in the district that would help them feel involved, informed, and valued. As a school board member, I will not shy away from calling for input from the community.

4. What is one specific challenge that you believe our schools are facing and how should we address it?

I believe that our district lacks the teacher diversity that would set it apart from all districts in the area. With a properly funded and executed Grow Your Own Teacher Program, there would be an organic growth of educators in this district that better represents the most diverse student population in the state. Students that have teachers that look like them feel more connected and their overall performance increases. It builds a sense of community and provides a steady stream of young educators that give back to the community that made them.

[Follow James Paul on Facebook](#)

Michael Anthony Fellows



1. Please tell us about yourself and why you are running for School Board.

I'm running because we need to address an education system that's failing our children and move the needle in the right direction to give them a sound education that'll prepare them to be successful in the future both monetarily and intellectually. Each student needs to be aware of the golden opportunity provided by the CTE wing. Promoting the trades would provide our children a way to make a living wage while simultaneously providing support to their community. Lastly, I will vehemently protect the Constitutional Rights of our children ensuring they're EDUCATED not INDOCTRINATED enabling them to think critically and FREELY to make decisions.

2. Explain what you take to be the appropriate relationship between the School Board and the Superintendent.

They should have a cohesive relationship to make sure the educational needs of the children are met and the children are receiving positive results from the curriculum provided. Open communication is the key to progress and will ensure the atmosphere of the workplace is one that will nurture and grow both teachers and students intellectually through vigorous debate of important topics. Freedom of speech is sacrosanct in order to make sure everyone's constitutional rights are protected and are not being violated from unconstitutional, unlawful and unenforceable mandates or executive orders from the Executive Branch in Albany or elsewhere.

3. What role should parents and teachers have in developing school policies?

Parents HAVE every right to choose what's being taught and more importantly what will NOT be taught to their children. Teachers have worked very hard to achieve their degrees/certificates and they need to have the freedom to mold their classroom based on what works for them. Teachers on the frontlines and understand what's strategies are working or not but they are NOT their student's parents. It will take a cooperative effort between parents and teachers to ensure the future success of each student and prevent students from falling behind before moving on to their next educational milestone.

4. What is one specific challenge that you believe our schools are facing and how should we address it?

Getting faculty to address the problems they face and without the fear of retribution for raising awareness on failed policies or agendas. Allowing members of our community to have the opportunity to apply and fill the positions that become available on the school board dismantling the echo chamber that currently exists. Creating an atmosphere that encourages children to become inspired and yearn to learn. The old school way had prepared me to be just as successful as anyone else and I will to bring that back for our community again.

[Follow Michael Fellows on Facebook](#)

Howard Potter



1. Please tell us about yourself and why you are running for School Board.

My name is Howard Potter. I am a husband and father to two amazing children. My daughter graduated from Proctor last year and my son is in 10th grade at Proctor. I am running for the school board to help change our school district and to help support the board members who have that same mission in mind for all of our children, parents, and faculty.

I am running for the school board to help be the change our school district needs and to help support the board members who have that same mission in mind for all of our children, parents, and faculty.

2. Explain what you take to be the appropriate relationship between the School Board and the Superintendent.

I feel that the board does not show that it is in charge as a whole and the optic is that the superintendent holds all of the power over the school board and not

the other way around. The board is supposed to maintain order over the district and the superintendent and in my opinion that is not what we have seen over the years. It is my understanding that we have three board members who are trying to be the change, but they are missing the 4th vote at every turn and they need our help in this election!

3. What role should parents and teachers have in developing school policies?

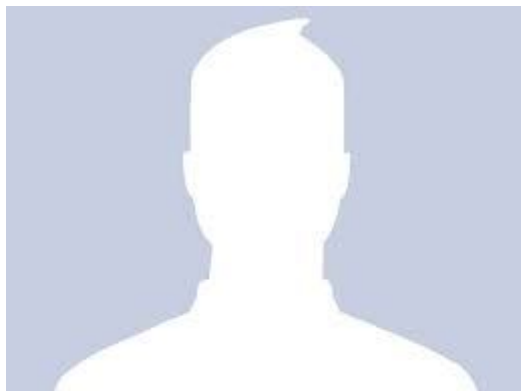
I think parents and teachers should be allowed to be involved in helping to develop school policies for the children. I also think we should have the children involved as well. Setting up a monthly meeting with teachers, parents, and children from each grade level. We are not in the classrooms and we are not at home with every child, so it is important to hear from all as needs change.

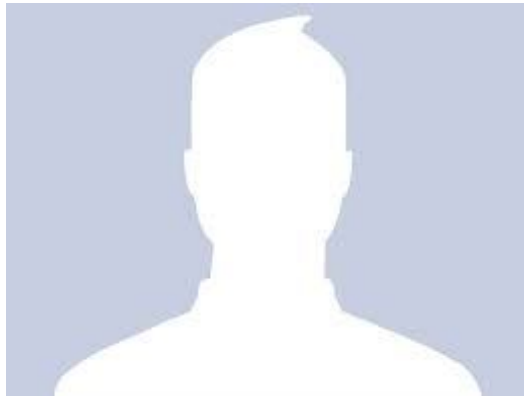
4. What is one specific challenge that you believe our schools are facing and how should we address it?

Morale... Does not matter if you are the child, parent, faculty, or support staff. So many feel defeated in our district for several reasons. We need to change the IMAGE and the MORALE of our district starting with putting our leadership in check and holding our administration accountable for how the district is managed daily. Be the CHANGE we want to SEE! Hold more school events than ever before to bring our community back together!

Meet Howard Potter on Facebook

Jack LoMedico and David Testa





Both Jack LoMedico and David Testa were invited to participate in this forum. Each declined.

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