

CLARENCE STUDENTS FIRST: BOE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2021

1) Please introduce yourself and provide background information, involvement with schools, volunteer experience, and qualifications.

Personal Background

I've been a proud resident of Clarence for 16 years, with my husband, Jeff, and three children, Tori (11th), Mason (9th), and Carter (7th). We chose Clarence as home for our family due to its small-town feel, amazing schools and taxpayer value. I want to preserve these reasons to choose Clarence for our residents, families and those looking to move into our community.

Education and Experience

With a Finance Degree (University at Buffalo), Master of Business Administration (Canisius College) and Master of Science in Management Information Systems (University at Buffalo), I currently work in Business Continuity and Crisis Management for a large financial institution. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be a challenge, particularly in my line of work. It requires me to have strong listening and communication skills, transparency, accountability, speed of execution and understanding of disciplines I may not necessarily be an expert in. I must understand the needs of our internal and external partners, customers, and the changing environment to ensure continuity of operations and operational resiliency before, during or after crisis situations. In order to be successful, I'm constantly using my problem solving and critical thinking skills and look forward to using these skills and my unique perspective and experience to serve the district and community.

I have prior experience in finance, audit and risk management in the banking, health insurance and Information Technology industries.

Volunteering and Service

My heart lies in my service to our community and children. Some of my most memorable moments are from volunteering opportunities I've been afforded as a Clarence parent and community member throughout the years.

I've held various Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) volunteer positions for Sheridan Hill Elementary (Yearbook Chair, Dinner and Movie Night Chair, Room Parent, School Photographer and Event Volunteer) and thoroughly miss my time volunteering in our elementary schools. It was always so wonderful helping in the classrooms for room activities or parties and watching the pure joy during interactions between our children and their teachers. While my kids explored various activities and interests throughout the years, I also served as a Girls on the Run Coach, Clarence Softball Coach, and Bulldogs Cheerleading manager.

I was also a past Clarence Youth Bureau Board Member. During my time on the Clarence Youth Bureau Board, I volunteered at community events, promoted the Youth Volunteer program and helped with the end of year youth recognition ceremony. The Youth Bureau Community Service program is one that is near and dear to my heart, as I know firsthand how rewarding youth volunteering can be to the giver and receiver.

I now serve as Clarence Golf Boosters President, Clarence Band Boosters Committee Chair and Volunteer, Girl Scout Leader and Boy Scout Volunteer. I've helped coordinate and plan events resulting in thousands of fund-raised dollars for these organizations, all of which directly supports our children and school.

Last but not least, I am a newly added member on the Clarence School District Strategic Planning Committee and am co-founder of Western New York (WNY) Students First and Clarence Students First, both advocacy groups working toward the common goals of giving students and families an organized and active voice. We've partnered with district parents and leaders across WNY and, thanks to this widespread support, I am excited to announce that WNY Students First is in the process of becoming an official non-profit serving WNY and surrounding area students and families.

My Voice, My Dedication, My Commitment

I am not a politician nor an educator; I am a full-time working mom who was frustrated during the onset of this pandemic and who quickly redirected energy to advocacy for our students and families across WNY. I have advocated tirelessly on behalf of our students via attending and speaking at our Board of Education (BOE) meetings, speaking and meeting with administrators, parents and teachers in and outside of our district, and writing letters and speaking to our government agencies.

I believe, as parents, we are the experts on the needs of our children and require a seat at the table. No matter your background, education or experience, we require a voice and are partners in the education of our children. Early on, when my children were in elementary school, I was told by an educator and psychologist that a parent is their child's #1 advocate and you should never be embarrassed or ashamed to stand up for their needs. I live by this statement and encourage parents to do the same.

2) What do you believe to be the most important issue facing Clarence Schools today? What should the Board do to address this?

As witness to the difficulties during this pandemic, my focus is on putting student needs first and advocacy. Priorities include the full and safe return to school, identifying and closing learning loss gaps, special education, and ensuring our students' mental, emotional, social and physical health needs are met. Keeping this in mind, I don't want to lose sight of our fiscal responsibility to our community and taxpayers. It's my promise to bring parent partnership to the board via transparency, accountability, collaboration and open communication. It is also critical to ensure we value parent choice as it relates to their children.

And while I support parent choice, nothing can replace the value of our educators, teachers and in classroom instruction. We need to work hard to safely get our children back in the classroom with the teachers, friends, administrators and support teams they love and miss, while restoring and improving our education system. This includes the careful and thoughtful consideration of teaching tools and curriculum content.

3) What considerations will you incorporate when thinking through the budget? What are your priorities? What constraints do you envision?

Given the difficulties during this year, concentration will need to be given to learning loss, mental, emotional and social health as well as creative ways to reconnect our children with their teachers and support staff. I envision this being a long process and not something that will happen overnight. Additionally, we need to focus on our special education programs to address any deficiencies related to needed therapies due to the pandemic. (see question #2 for additional information on priorities).

While addressing this year's shortcomings due to the pandemic, we also need to focus on preserving our current programs, classes, and staff positions to ensure our students' needs are met. This includes looking into additional in-school therapists, considering additional support staff such as teacher aides to make sure our children's needs are met in the classroom and ensuring our children and teachers have access to the resources needed to be successful. Our educational programs and tools need to be relevant, useful, and impactful.

With this year's large federal and state aid allocation, it will be crucial to strategically plan our budget spending, ensure dollars directly benefit our children and protect our district from a future budget crisis that would burden our taxpayers. I envision years one and two to be status quo, however I fear that we may find ourselves in a financial crisis in years three, four and five if we are not creative and smart with our long-term budget strategy.

It will be imperative to engage all stakeholders while brainstorming ideas, developing plans and funding projects that will best serve our children now and in years to follow. In turn, this will create more collaborative relationships between our board, parents, district, and community, and provide more equitable, effective budgets and planning. Also, we need to constantly learn from our successes and failures in order to execute more effectively for the good of our students. The only way to achieve this is to be transparent, provide easy access to information, understand decisions and how they will impact our children, and create a strong culture of accountability for all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process. The more we work together and learn from each other, the more unified and successful we will be in achieving our goals and getting our district back to #1.

4) What role should the school district play in addressing student learning loss and the mental health issues associated with remote learning and the pandemic?

It will be critical for the school, board, administration, and teachers to partner in order to address student learning loss and mental health issues associated with remote learning and the pandemic. We need a holistic approach working together, talking to parents, and engaging all stakeholders. Additionally, I believe a postmortem evaluation of the last year, by grade level, is needed to identify the things that went well and those that didn't, so we can enhance future programming, ensure that our curriculum benefits our students, and that our synchronous and asynchronous offerings are effective. Also, an operational resilience and comprehensive crisis management plan should be adopted to address potential issues that could negatively impact our students, teachers, and community in the future.

5) What do you think can be done to improve transparency from the Board if you gain a seat?

I firmly believe, especially given our unstable environment, that it is critical to be an advocate, be transparent, honest, and have open communication with all stakeholders. I believe the board needs to take a more active role in responding to community correspondence and that our public comment session rules need to be more inclusive and responsive to community and parent concerns. Now, more than ever, transparency will be critical to the success of our district. I would like to see our district be back to #1 and this will not happen without full

transparency. It is my promise to bring parent partnership to the board via transparency, accountability, collaboration, and open communication. This includes open and transparent dialogue. You cannot be transparent without two-way communication.

6) How do you define diversity? What does it mean for you to have a commitment to diversity?

Diversity can be defined and related to so many different areas such as culture, race, religion, age, gender identification, population, curriculum, and thought. Diversity shouldn't be something that divides us; it should be something that unites us. I've tried to expose my children from a young age to different types of diversity and raise them to appreciate that each of us brings something special and unique to the table. It is imperative that our district embrace diversity and allow our students to be exposed to all sides.

The district has a responsibility to our community, parents and students to develop sound diversity practices and ensure we are inclusive in everything we do. This includes policy and procedures, student awareness, curriculum development and programming. Diversity also applies to all district stakeholder committees. The Diversity Inclusion Advisory Council (DICA) Committee and all other district level committees should be equally diverse in its make-up and stakeholder participation. This includes engaging our community and their thoughts on diversity in our district and how to effectively present it to our students, staff and community to instill unity.

7) What was your view on when and how to reopen schools this past year?

I am, and always have been, in full support of a full and safe reopening of schools now. I also am a firm believer of parent choice. I believe it is time to get our students back in school full-time, by choice, as kids have suffered emotional, socially and mentally. In-school virus transmission is still unfounded and I believe that our school classrooms are the safest place for our children. The more I talk to the community and parents, the more I realize that people have full faith in our ability to keep our students and teachers safe while in school.

8) What role, if any, should the Board play in helping set curriculum?

I believe the Board is the eyes and ears of our community and families. With the assistance and partnership of our district, the Board has a responsibility to improve our education system including the careful and thoughtful consideration of resources and curriculum content. The Board must work hard to understand federal, state, and department of education mandates and make sure they advocate and speak on behalf of our parents' and community's opinions as it relates to the education of their children and the programs that are presented. This includes curriculum content and special programming.

The district, with input from all stakeholders, must constantly review curriculum at each grade level to ensure it's relevant, beneficial to our students and embodies the expectations of our

families and community. Our children are being raised to be our future leaders and deserve the best we can give them in terms of educational content, consistency, and fairness.

9) What are your views regarding differentiated learning opportunities and the cost associated with providing them?

The Clarence School District must meet each child where they are academically. It is imperative that our schools accept costs related to this and continue to invest in providing our students with all levels of learning, from helping those with severe learning loss from the pandemic, to giving every opportunity for those ready for high level learning.

As it relates to remote learning, I support parent choice but believe that nothing can replace the value of our educators, teachers and in classroom instruction. We need to work hard to safely get our children back in the classroom with the support teams they love. This year has proved that we need to ensure our district accommodates parent choice but does so economically and within reason. Prior to the pandemic, parents had three options: public education, homeschooling or private education. With this year's turn of events, we've also had to adopt hybrid and remote learning. It is unrealistic for a district and its taxpayers to continue to offer all options. It will be critical for the board and district to work together to figure out what will best support our students and families going forward. In order to do this, we need to engage all stakeholders and understand these needs and how they will impact our taxpayers, families, community and district.

Also, if a remote option is a mandated platform of learning, we need to ensure that our remote offering is one that is engaging to students, offers hands on learning opportunities, maximizes synchronous learning and is mindful to the amount of screen time our children are engaged in.

10) What would you view as your role on the Board of Education?

My role on the Board, as a community elected official, is to be a liaison between parents and community and the Superintendent and school. It is our role to make sure we are engaged with parents and the community and work with the Superintendent to understand the needs of our families, district, and teachers in order to best serve our children, their education, and their needs. Open dialogue, two-way communication, partnership, full transparency, and accountability are imperative.

Additionally, I don't want to lose sight of our fiscal responsibility to our community and taxpayers. Given this year's large federal and state aid allocation, it will be crucial to strategically plan our budget spending, ensure dollars directly benefit our children and protect our district from a future budget crisis.

I am committed to making a difference, working hard for our children, community, school district and with a new superintendent while partnering with our parents to help foster change that will directly benefit our students now and in the years to come. It's time to get Clarence back to the #1 school district.