

**CLARENCE STUDENTS FIRST**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2021 – MICHAEL FUCHS**

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

My wife Julie and I moved to Clarence twenty-two years ago to start our family. We chose Clarence because we valued the strong sense of community and the outstanding schools found here. Over the years, we have been blessed with the exceptional education provided to our daughters and the opportunities afforded to them from living in such an amazing community.

For the last nine years I have had the honor of serving this community as a member of the Board of Education. I first ran for office in 2012 after having served on the SH PTO as Treasurer for 3 years. Since being elected, I have advocated for the restoration of positions in the district while working to stabilize and strengthen the district's financial position to ensure we are never again faced with the devastating cuts we had to endure in 2013.

Since being elected, I have devoted my time to board service. Through participation in any number of organizations and committees, I strive to deepen my knowledge of educational issues and governance so that I may better serve the community who elected me.

Professionally, I have held various progressive financial roles over the last 25 years with two companies. I currently serve as CFO of O-AT-KA Milk Products Cooperative and have been with the company 6 years. Prior to that, I worked at Rich Products for 19 years, most recently as Director of Global Supply Chain Finance. I earned a BS in Accounting from SUNY Fredonia and an EMBA from the University at Buffalo. I also hold a CMA license. Over my career I have gained valuable knowledge not only in financial management and strategic planning but also in leadership and collaboration. It is these skills, that I have brought to the BOE for the last nine years to help steady the finances of the district while balancing the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders.

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

As Clarence begins the process of reopening schools fully under revised NYS guidance, I believe the biggest near term challenge of the school system is how we support our students and staff during the return to full time, in person learning. We will need to address issues of learning loss and varied social and emotional needs of our students, staff and families. As a BOE, it is our responsibility to allocate the resources necessary to accomplish these goals. Using the recently received federal stimulus funds we are well positioned to fund the additional resources needed.

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

Every year the budget cycle has unique elements but at the core, the same challenges exist. The reality is we have more wants and needs as a district than we could ever fund responsibly. As a result, prioritization and trade offs are necessary. My priorities remain the same as they were when I was first elected in 2012. To ensure that each graduating class is afforded a better education than the class before. As the expectations and needs of the district change, so do the specific priorities we must support and fund to accomplish this same goal. Throughout my time on the board, we have worked hard to first restore many of the positions lost at the time of the budget defeat while also addressing new and evolving needs. New positions were hired for, ranging from psychologists to additional elementary teaching positions needed to maintain ideal class sizes for learning at all grade levels. In addition, we have invested resources in a Family Support center, curriculum design, staff development, additional technologies and facility upgrades just to mention a few. Our goal each year remains focused on how we get better.

Over the last nine years we have done an excellent job looking beyond the current budget to understand what challenges exist on the horizon so that we are prepared to navigate any rough waters ahead better than we were able to do back in 2011-13. Over the next three years, the greatest funding obstacle remains the state's ability to fund education. While the signals coming from Albany have been positive in this regard, my concern remains the long-term fiscal health of the state. Through our current fiscal planning, and realizing the benefit of the non-recurring federal funding, I believe we will be able to fund needed improvements while staying at or below the tax cap.

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?

As I covered in question #2, I believe our number one priority revolves around this issue. As a BOE we control the budget and must dedicate the resources necessary to ensure that we address the issue of learning loss and the social and emotional needs of our students, staff, and families.

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

As a board we have always strived to be open with the community. Our monthly meetings have always been open, and we worked to shift our streaming platform mid-year to allow for a technology that would provide real time viewing of the meetings for those unable to attend in person. The district website is utilized to post updates on issues (example, Reopening Plans and the Superintendent Search) to ensure that the community is aware of critical activities. If re-elected I would welcome feedback for anyone who feels we could improve in a particular area.

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

While the word diversity can be used in many contexts, for myself in the setting of the school system, diversity speaks to the need for the inclusion and engagement of all students, staff, and families. I am committed to continue to ensure that the Clarence Schools are a safe, nurturing, and engaging place for all. As a district we have put in place any number of policies and programs to promote these ideals. Most recently we began the process of launching a Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council to assist us in improving our overall school environment.

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

As a sitting BOE member, I could not have been more proud of the work done by all involved in reopening the Clarence Schools last September. A tremendous amount of hard work, time, planning and effort was put into meeting Department Of Health requirements that seemed to change weekly. With each shift, our administrators and staff adjusted plans to ensure that we could get our kids back in the building for the fall. As the year progressed, we adapted to each change without losing focus of the goal of getting as many students back as soon as the guidance allowed. We were happy to welcome the elementary kids back full time last month and are pleased that we were one of only three districts in Western New York able to bring the Middle School students back more fully due to decisions we made last summer regarding cohorting. We are now preparing to welcome more students back to the buildings as the positive case metrics we must adhere to are trending towards the levels needed to reopen the High School.

I recognize there is great number of families that have been affected by the events of the last year. I also understand why some may not agree with how NYS has handled the school health reopening guidance. Please know that, regardless of one's views, as a public school district we are required to follow the guidelines set forth by the state.

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

One of the main roles of the board is to ensure that we monitor the performance of the district and discuss strategies to close educational gaps. It is critical that we do this to ensure we not only maintain the high-quality education this district offers but also strive to continually improve. Through our annual review of assessments and data, the board gains an understanding of the program offerings and allows us an opportunity to engage with staff members, including our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, to better understand the strategies employed and options being explored to modify and enhance our programs to meet the desired outcomes.

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

Each student has a learning style that is unique to them. To be the most effective teacher, differentiation in the classroom is required and I am pleased with what our teachers are able to accomplish in meeting the needs of our learners given the many priorities they must juggle in the classroom daily. It is through the differentiation of instruction both within and beyond the classroom that students become more engaged in learning. It is this engagement that leads to the success and growth of the student which is at the core of our District mission.

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

As a BOE member I see it as my role to listen to all views and perspectives, continue to learn and educate myself on the issues, and collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure that we continue to deliver the excellence we all expect from our school system. Over the last nine years I have served on the BOE as a representative for this community and have strived to live up to these ideals.