

**CLARENCE STUDENTS FIRST**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2021: DENNIS PRIORE**

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

Thank you for reaching out to me and giving me the opportunity to express my views to your organization. I worked 36 years in public education, 18 as a classroom teacher and 18 as an administrator that covered city, suburban and rural school districts. In retirement I have been actively involved with a number of organizations including being elected to the boards of: the Clarence Central School District, the Clarence Youth Board, and Buffalo Niagara Honor Flight. I also volunteer with the Erie County Association of School Boards where I am our Boards' legislative representative. I volunteer and serve as a lector at St. Mary's of Swormville RC Church. I've also volunteered with the Clarence Schools Enrichment Foundation, our school district PTO's, Choral Boosters, as well and several local, state and national educational organizations. My wife Karen and I are the proud parents of two successful Clarence graduates. All of this isn't enough unless you take the time to study, read and pour through hundreds of pages of reports and data each month, attend meetings, ceremonies, music, sporting and school celebrations. I have made that commitment.

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

The most important issue facing the Clarence Schools today is supporting our students as they begin and continue to advance to returning to full time in-school instruction. Over the past year our world has been turned upside down, students, parents, teachers, school staff, administrators and your board members have pivoted to change things on the fly. Talking to employees in other districts, Clarence has done as good a job and in many cases better than most school districts. But we need to and we will be doing more. As a Board member I realize the pain and damage that our students have and are going through. That's why I have lobbied our local and state officials to work with us to 1. Follow the National guidelines and 2. Provide the additional resources to help our students and staff return to a more normal place. Thanks to the unprecedented support from our State and Federal governments we have been given a generational gift of resources (grants) to apply during a three year term to address this. A detailed draft will be rolled out at the May 10th Board meeting and will be available online by the time you read this.

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

The public votes on our budget each year on the third Tuesday in May, but your administrators and Board begin the drafting of our budget nine months earlier in August. Each year we begin with the notion to maintain our successful existing programs, before we entertain any additions. As I alluded to in my response in number 2, the additional supports will actually be given to us in the form of grants and will not be a part of the budget and or approval process. My priorities are to keep Clarence moving forward and provide a quality education for all of our students. The constraints we face are providing a budget that is mindful of what our community can afford. We get feedback from two groups, one group usually wants more programs and spending, and another group doesn't necessarily want less but is not willing to pay more. We try to balance this each year and in 2013 (while I wasn't on the Board then) we learned our lesson about trying to exceed 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?

I think I addressed a good part of this in my response in number two; I am committed to addressing the mental health issues associated with this last year of the pandemic. We will be adding additional supports that many of our stakeholders have been requesting but until this year we were not able to afford, and for the reason I stated in my response to question number 3.

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

Let me start by telling you what we currently are doing as far as transparency. We of course have at least monthly board meetings that are now live streamed and recorded for anyone to watch at their leisure. We have quarterly newsletters, community forums, and this year we have sent out a great deal of email blasts and letters to the community as we travel through this unusual year of the pandemic. These are some of the things we do on a district level, and each building addresses similar items and more. One thing I would like to see us improve on a district level is to have a greater presence on social media platforms. I know some of the schools use Twitter and Facebook but as a district we really haven't utilized these to the extent possible. It is something that we embrace and it's something I think our board is committed to trying expand in the near future.

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

I would agree with this definition from the Oxford dictionary: "the state of being diverse, variety, the practice of including or involving people from range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientation's etc." I believe as a district we are committed to that. Our district this year began a Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council (DIAC); it is made up of a number of stakeholders in our community and headed by Assistant Superintendent, Kristin Overholt. It embraces and follows the four areas of the New York State Culturally Responsive Education Framework: 1. A welcoming and Affirming Environment. 2. High expectations and Rigorous Instruction. 3. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment and 4. Ongoing Professional Learning. This committee has developed an implementation timeline and has also surveyed a number of constituencies and universities for their feedback as well. I am looking forward to studying more of the recommendations from the DIAC committee.

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

This year was a challenge for everyone including school districts in the area, New York State and the nation, but I will put our plan, and our results up against any local school district. While we may not have agreed with all the laws, and regulations, we followed them. I personally wrote, lobbied and attended sessions with our local, and state health departments and our local and state legislators. I realize not everybody is happy with what we did, but we were able to do it better, safer and faster than any other local school district.

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

Much of the curriculum that is taught in our schools is adapted by the New York State Education Department. We have some leeway in how that material is presented and how that is adapted in our schools and of course with teacher input as well. We also approve elective courses and we've also started in the last few years different academies. So as a board we do oversee and approve curriculum and within the guidelines set by the State Education Department.

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

All students do not learn in the same mode, style or at the same rate and so our teachers differentiate learning each and every day. I don't necessarily think that we need to have increased costs to do that. I think we have the resources to do that now.

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

The Board of Education actually employs only one person and that is the Superintendent of Schools. Every other employee directly or indirectly reports to him or her. We do adapt policy and we do set regulations, but our job is not to micromanage every single detail or every single problem. We have a chain of command and if a person may have a complaint, (such as a parent(s)), they first need to discuss it with their child's teacher. If they don't receive satisfaction there, then they should talk to their child's assistant principal or principal. If they don't get satisfaction there, then they should bring it up at the district level. Only-then if and when after all those remedies have not been met-with that person(s') satisfaction should it come to the Board of Education. That's how good efficient school districts and

organizations work. That doesn't mean that you can't address a general concern either in writing or in person to the Board of Education, but specific issues are best handled first at the school level.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views on these topics, I urge everyone to vote on Tuesday May 18th from 7 am to 9 pm at the Clarence High School gym. I hope you will vote yes on our budget and bus propositions, and I would be honored to have your vote as well. Dennis Priore