
Why should you be elected to the school board?

Joy A Young

I am running for the Berkeley Heights Board of Education (BOE) because I believe in the value of giving back to our community and our school district. As a child of educators, I understand how important it is for schools to allow our students to develop relationships, increase knowledge, express themselves, investigate opportunities and be inquisitive in a safe and nurturing environment. My professional and personal experience includes:

- Former workplace experience and space planning manager and currently workplace strategy lead and change management professional for Americas region at an American multinational healthcare company. In these roles I planned and executed a campus master plan impacting 425K square feet of office space and now work collaboratively to enhance productivity and to create a sense of community for employees in the workplace.
 - Direct experience responding to COVID-19 pandemic; created Return to Workplace Guide for administrative workplaces.
 - Volunteer for Girl Scouts as troop leader, organizing multiple community service activities.
- The aforementioned experiences as well as my unique perspective as an African American parent will all inform my unique perspective in my role if elected to serve the BOE.

What do you consider an important challenge facing the school district? How would you address it?

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The impact that COVID-19 has had on students, families, teachers and administrators is an important challenge facing our school district. This is an unprecedented crisis which can exacerbate educational deficiencies and cause a potential loss in learning.

Short-term, we must ensure that students are engaged in learning and that the learning environment is consistent for all students from kindergarten through high school. Although each student may have access to similar resources when working virtually, the support they receive at home will vary greatly due to the personal and professional commitments of their parents and the set up of their work environment. This can increase the disparity in learning.

To address this challenge I propose:

- Reevaluating existing methods of assessment and adjusting to capture the positive and negative impacts of virtual learning. Education remediation plans must be put in place for each child.
- Increasing communication between faculty and parents to address concerns. This could include monthly listening sessions for the parents that are facilitated by each school principal and guidance staff. These sessions may increase based on the need of an individual school.
- Increasing outreach and understanding of the academic, social, and emotional impact of the new educational model on our students. This can occur through classroom discussions, surveys and focus group discussions. Only once these challenges are understood, can planning begin.
- Gathering data into a system that is easily accessible and creates meaningful reports for evaluation. This will require a review of existing systems to ensure they meet the needs of the current learning methodology.
- Providing additional professional development opportunities and sharing of district wide best practices among all faculty. We must be open to leverage any innovations coming out of this crisis.

That can be achieved by piloting new learning platforms and methods of delivery that could benefit the district.

- Monitoring the budget for unexpected COVID-19 related expenses that can create a financial strain on our educational system. Monthly financial updates should be provided and recommendations should be discussed with the community if budget modifications are required.

Long-term, we must develop an education remediation plan for when students return to school full time. The plan must identify competencies of each student that require attention with individual action plans and measurable outcomes for success.

What are the most important factors for student success? How will you, as a school board member, ensure that those factors are addressed?

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The most important factor for student success is the understanding that the individual needs of students differ and we must address those differences. Focus and drive varies among the students and the required support is not one size fits all. We must decipher how each student is motivated and provide individualized direction for them to meet their goals. The schools must create an inclusive culture that makes students feel like they are a part of the school community regardless of their ability. This can be achieved by augmenting the counselor/student relationship at the middle and high school levels with additional support from another faculty member that can serve as a mentor.

How will you communicate with parents and others concerned with education? How do you plan to respond to concerns?

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We need to ensure that we are reaching everyone and provide an opportunity for every voice to be heard. Not everyone processes information in the same way and a multi-tiered approach of gathering and sharing information with the community is needed.

Some ideas for greater outreach can include facilitating topic specific listening sessions with the community. This session would be in addition to the scheduled board meetings. Follow up from the listening session could include posting a video that addresses concerns identified during the sessions and summarizes information about a topic, emailing and posting frequently asked question (FAQs) and adding quick links on the current district website that will allow for easy access to all documentation related to a specific topic.

One idea could be sending out mailers to the entire community when a topic affects all taxpayers. An additional way to gather information is to distribute a yearly pulse check survey, followed by data review and distribution of a summary of key findings and providing action items for areas that require improvement.

A more informal method of gathering information would be providing an electronic feedback box on the website. This multi-tiered approach enhances two-way connectivity across our community.