

# JERSEY CITY TOGETHER

## Who We Are

Jersey City Together is a broad-based, non-partisan organization of religious congregations, non-profits, parent organizations, and tenant groups working together to address issues in our city. We work on issues important to our members and our communities -- in particular issues related to housing affordability, education, public safety, and criminal justice.

In late 2017, Jersey City Together began to re-organize and strengthen its education team, working hand-in-hand with parent leaders, parent councils, and PTAs. Since that time, we've listened to more than 500 parents in small gatherings across the city.

This non-partisan candidate questionnaire was developed by the Jersey City Together Education Team.

## What This Is

Jersey City Together's Education Team sent out our non-partisan questionnaire to all candidates running for the Jersey City Board of Education. It is meant strictly for informational purposes. We do not endorse candidates.

We provided the following instructions for candidates:

*Please complete the top informational section and answer the open-ended questions below. Please keep your answers to each of the questions to 100 words or fewer. Longer responses will be cut at the 100-word mark. Additionally, if you would like us to include a photo on your information sheet, please send the photo as a separate attachment on the email.*

*Jersey City Together is strictly non-partisan and does not endorse candidates for office.*

In a few instances, candidates went beyond the 100 word limit. Where that was the case, we allowed them to finish their sentence. We then note on the answer if an answer was shortened.

We have compiled answers using the order in which candidates are placed on the ballot. The candidates for 3-year terms are first. The candidates for 1-year terms are second.

We have kept candidates' responses to one page.

If you have questions or concerns, you can reach out to our education team by emailing [education@njtogether.org](mailto:education@njtogether.org).

**Candidate Name:** Tara Stafford

**Ballot Position:** 1D

**Slate (if applicable):**

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I'm running because my passion and purpose align with the Jersey City Board of Education's mission to ensure each child a comprehensive education. If elected, I plan to use my experiences as a mentor to young women and skillset as a senior risk analyst to advance that mission. As an Independent, I'm ready to rise above the political animosity surrounding the board and build bridges to solve the district's biggest challenges.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

This district is facing several big issues, but I would say inequities between some of our schools, especially when it comes to facilities and safety, top the list. Additionally, working to dispel negative stereotypes surrounding Jersey City Public Schools would be a goal. The one thing I can immediately impact is the one thing I'd have most control over - addressing the negative atmosphere and perceptions of the JCBOE.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

Given the financial crisis Jersey City Public Schools face, I support the 1% payroll tax. If plausible supplements & alternatives to a payroll tax are presented to board members and other public officials, they should be given consideration, but the priority should be achieving full funding. One thing I would like to explore is using the payroll tax as a tool to begin shifting the property tax burden from city to schools. According to Civic Parent – in 2018, 50% of the total tax levy went to the city vs. 24% going to the public schools (the other 26% was county).

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

I will be a champion of the parents, teachers, and activists that are currently doing the work. My priority as a JCBOE trustee is to make sure they have the resources to succeed.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

It's difficult for many working-class people, plus students & teachers, to attend JCBOE meetings. One thing I'd like to look into is having the board host flexible public meetings, possibly on weekends, so as to make them more accessible and increase transparency.

**Candidate Name:** Noemi Velasquez

**Ballot Position:** 2D

**Slate (if applicable):** Change for Children

**Term length sought:** ☒Three-year ☐One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I have worked as an educator and community activist for more than 40 years. Most of my career focused on the 30,000+ children in the Jersey City education system, in various capacities, from an educator to an Associate Superintendent. My extensive knowledge of the greater issues ailing our education system today, is why I am running for the Jersey City's School Board.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

There are over a dozen critical issues, including dilapidated school facilities, after school program cuts, and the lack of community involvement when it comes to our children and parents. We must take a hard look at the district, have an open line of communications with parents, superintendent, teachers, and administrators to understand the priorities in each school better and work to tackle them with the involvement of the parents. We, as a board, can't have a silos approach and need to work in partnership with all relevant parties to improve the quality of education and experience for all the children.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

Collaboration is key. We need to work with the city council and state to find ways to identify new revenue for our schools. But first, we need to conduct an audit, determine how the money was spent and share it with the community. Something that has not happened. We also need to stop giving away abatements, but for the current pilot money, it should be allocated to the schools.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

As a former educator, my goal is to close the gap of disparity amounts the schools, especially when it comes to special needs children. We need to understand and work with the superintendent improve the curriculum, ensure the children have their basic needs met, ensure they are not being bullied/mistreated, and ensure there are proper activities to keep them intellectually engaged. Feedback from the parents and teachers is critical to understand make the necessary changes for the children.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Restoring better conduct at the board meetings is essential. Board meetings will be more efficient with board members who understand their role in district governance. The entire board must understand our position and be advocates for students FIRST. Secondly, board members will be responsive to the community, and meetings should reflect that. Parents and the community will receive notice of all meetings in advance, and every effort should be made to schedule meetings with working parents in mind. Lastly, translation services should be available for parents who speak English as a second language. They deserve the right to listen and advocate.

**Candidate Name:** Alexander Hamilton

**Ballot Position:** 3D

**Slate (if applicable):** Change for Children

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I am running for a three-year term for the Jersey City School Board to bring my innovative spirit and strong work ethic to the community and families of Jersey City. I have been part of Jersey City for over 30 years, a patent inventor and entrepreneur. The Board has made wrong decisions for our children and the community, causing so much chaos within the school system from voter suppression, lack of transparency to a \$50million legal lawsuits, potentially impacting future board. There are too many missed opportunities for all children; it is time for a change.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

We need to identify both traditional and emerging vocations that are relevant in today's workforce. The Change for Children slate is looking to bring back, not only vocational classes but opportunities in new emerging fields. We need to stay relevant, identify, and provide the necessary resources to prepare our educators and student post-graduation better. Additionally, we must work with our schools to provide a more rigorous-based curriculum to those requiring more challenging course work. We can't stay stagnant; we need to identify and facilitate as many educational opportunities for the children, now.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

We are for the 1% Payroll tax, but we can't stop here, we need to find new revenue like community reinvestments. If companies are coming to Jersey City to invest, they need to invest in our children first, and we will work with the city council to ensure funds are benefiting our children's education and teachers. We need a mandate where corporations must contribute to the education system to ensure our students receive the best education and provided a safe environment for a school.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

As a parent of a special needs child, I see first-hand how our school system is failing our kids and our teachers. We have incredible teachers who should be celebrated for their work. Communication with all parents, teachers, and principals is critical. We need to better understand the needs of a child, as well as the teachers. Collaboration and engagement in these schools are important steps for success and growth.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Currently, there is no transparency within the current board. Meetings are set up without consideration of the community. Meetings change or hosted in the most inconvenient times to get a low turnover. Jersey City has one of the largest multicultural community, and many are not native English speakers. As a team, we will go to all the communities, set up meetings in different Wards to reach as many parents and community members, organize meetings, sometimes on a Saturday, and avoid kid friendly holidays. For example, hosting a BOE during Halloween. Parents/guardians will have to choose between their kids and going to a meeting.

**Candidate Name:** Asheenia Johnson

**Ballot Position:** 4D

**Slate (if applicable):** Change for Children

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

The priority is the safety and well-being of the children and their educators. The budget crisis a problem we need to address today, as it impacts the 30,000+ students in Jersey City. My extensive involvement within the community and continued commitment to moving families forward are why I am running for a three-year term position at Jersey City School Board. It is time to restore our focus on what matters, the children, and their education system.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

Vocational education has been a hallmark of a solid school system. Jersey City's current board members have no concrete plans to bring these classes back. We are here to fight for what the children of Jersey City need, and this includes bringing Vocational courses, as well as art and music back. As for vocational, college is not for all children. It's designed to prepare a young person to hone in on their skills, have a career, and provide for a family. Many young people today would be more productive in society if a robust vocational curriculum was in place.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

We need to conduct a thorough audit to understand how we got here and where we can trim some cost. We know 100% it will not come at the expense of our valued teachers or principals. We can't afford to walk away from money like the current board did earlier this year. We believe the 1% payroll tax was overdue, but not the end solution. We need to work with city constituents to find a new revenue, an example could be the pilot money from abatements. There should be a mandate in place to bring in funds from those profiting from our community.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

Working closely with the superintendent, the parents, and principal, we will get to the bottom of the significant issues ailing each of these special needs school. We will determine if the schools are properly staffed, as well as review the curriculum and the facilities. Children are our #1 priority, and we will ensure the children are treated with the dignity and respect they deserved.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Our great insights come from our parents, teachers, and people within the community, passionate about the progress of our schools. It will be a mandate for all meetings to have a structure; minutes are provided online with a reasonable time, translated in multiple languages for our parents who are not fluent in English. Jersey City is the most culturally diverse city. We believe in not just waiting for board meetings but going out and engaging with all the districts and the diverse community. Our objective is to instill an inclusive environment for all attendees.

**Candidate Name:** Sudhan Thomas

**Ballot Position:** 5D

**Slate (if applicable):** Education Matters

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year

**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I ran for the JCBOE in 2016 after having become a father in 2014 and seeing the world through the prism of my son's eyes. Jersey City is a diverse city with diverse problems. Over the last 3 years between the sad reality of attending 14 funerals of JCBOE children and seeing first hand the effect of broken families, substance abuse, crime, special needs in addition to the concerted effort to under fund our schools have spurred and motivated me to run for another 3 years. As a Parent, Business Person and Educator I bring a unique trifecta perspective which I have used in the last 3 years and will continue to in the next 3 years. *[Answer shortened]*

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

I will call Facilities/Infrastructure along with Curriculum/Instruction as the 2 largest challenges facing our school district after funding.

The state (SDA/DOE) grossly underfunded the 2005 Long Range Facilities Plan. They merely funded \$ 300 million of the \$ 1.3 Billion which has left our school facilities in disarray. One of the 6 buildings targeted for replacement in 2005, the AHM building is crumbling today. The Board is undertaking a comprehensive facilities, demographic /capacity overview and will come out with an updated LRFP shortly. We will look to fund the LRFP through a combination of measures including private partnerships, Government funding et al so we are not left dependent on the state. *[Answer shortened]*

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

Our approach to the funding has been a 7 point all-encompassing approach: Operations Efficiency, Elimination of Waste, HR Rationalization / Optimization, Legal, Legislative Advocacy, Increase in Revenues, and Abatements.

The district has saved about \$ 50 million through operations efficiency. This is not by cutting programs but by doing the same thing efficiently. For instance the JCBOE withdrawal from the State Health Insurance Program saved the district about \$ 30 million in insurance costs but also helped to effectuate 4% more cash in the pockets of the employees by eliminating the draconian chapter 78. At this point we are \$200 million underfunded. *[Answer shortened.]*

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

We have 4138 special education students in the JCBOE of which about 310 are placed out of district We spend \$ 130 million to support our special needs students but we are fully aware that our parents and children deserve more and deserve the best. Towards this we have undertaken a comprehensive audit of the special ed services to identify the gaps and bring services and support to JCBOE that would fully services our special needs population.

We also want to look forward and create pathways for our special need students beyond their time with us in our schools.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Under my Presidency, we have opened all school board caucus and meeting to live FACEBOOK transmission. In addition we have ended and eliminated all curbs to public comment by allowing folks to register at the meetings and speak (Earlier there was a 48 hour cut off). We have also created a policy for public to comment via video conference which we will launch in November of 2019. I am the Frist President of the Board to submit a monthly snap shot of the work and issues affecting the district. Our newly created Board committee on parents/community meets every month in an informal setting which allows parents to engage with Board and Administration. *[Answer shortened.]*



**Candidate Name:** Gerald Lyons

**Ballot Position:** 6D

**Slate (if applicable):** Education Matters JC

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I have been a JCBOE School Board Member for approximately six years and have enjoyed working to assist the JC PUBLIC schools with issues, and there are many. I have taken this role very seriously, heading the Policy, Special Ed, Food and Nutrition, Personnel, and Community Outreach Committees and assisting on several Ad Hoc committees. I am an urban educator for 32 years, have seven teaching certs, finished one MA in Ed., am completing a second MA in Ed. Adm, and have seven credits towards a doctorate in Ed. Education has been my passion throughout my adult life.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

Variables that negatively impact the success of our students include poverty, issues at home, environmental concerns, language barriers, access to technology, and the condition of the schools. These are not minor concerns or ones that can be quickly fixed. We have identified 44 languages (not including sub dialects spoken in our schools. We have students that live in neighborhoods that have many safety issues. We have families that are struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over their head. We have students who don't have access to technology once they leave school. We have schools that are over 100 years old and the State refused to provide funding for needed repairs. *[Answer shortened.]*

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

This is the biggest issue that we currently face as this impacts every aspect of our district. We are working with the City to request additional financial assistance. We need to discuss every other method of raising funds that are reasonable. We are working on some small issues like renting out parking spaces, implementing a vending program and establishing a foundation but these would only be a drop in the bucket. We need to get funding through the city, county, state, and federal government to cover this massive shortage in funding.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

As a teacher who had many special ed students in my class for decades, I know how important it is that this population receives the appropriate services. I have addressed many areas of concern that were brought to my attention (transportation, IEP concerns, providing access) on a one-on-one basis and will continue to do so. I have also requested that the district conduct a residency verification program to identify students in the special ed program who are not Jersey City residents as I have received many complaints about this. I want all students to get the best services they can but the JCBOE needs to ensure that our funds are being used on our students. *[Answer shortened.]*

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

I fought to overturn the ILLEGAL action put forward by a previous Board that stopped all recording of public comments at Caucus and School Board meetings. The ACLU took my case and sent a letter to the district letting them know that this was illegal. The district reversed this action immediately. When on the Policy Committee, I pushed for all Policies and Procedures to be posted on the district Website for ease of access. I have fought to have issues discussed in executive session made public once they were legally settled as I believe that it's important for the community to know what has taken place. *[Answer shortened.]*

**Candidate Name:** Darwin Ona

**Ballot Position:** 7D

**Slate (if applicable):** Education Matters

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year

**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I am, and come from a family of public servants. Instilled in me is the importance of giving back to the community. A key component to being a good detective is being able to listen and make proper evaluations based on the facts/evidence. Listening to the teachers, parents and students while evaluating school performance data is how I would best serve. I support unions and I am honored that the teachers have extended their faith in me because they recognize my potential, believe I bring a fresh perspective and have the ability to listen and bridge gaps.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

Everything stems from the budget. However, initiating a proper dialogue that includes but is not limited to the school system, the municipality, county government, parent groups and the developers, would cost us nothing. Each district school faces its own challenges. We need to look at all options to find revenue but take a stand to prevent more staff lay-offs or cuts to programs and resources. Boost the teacher moral so they can continue to work hard with what they have. The emphasis should be back on the children, fighting for them not over them.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

The city school system is overwhelmed by rapid growth in population, lack of land due to rapid development, lack of funding from several areas, like tax abated developments, inadequate school levy contributions, deteriorating facilities. Not just one thing will fix all of this; we need to explore multiple avenues for revenue. Expand school district non-profits, grants, partnerships that include the City and County government, local businesses, parent & teacher groups, with the board, whomever they may be. As our tax base has increased a review of increasing the school levy in small increments must not be ignored.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

Education needs to be by equity and not by equality. There is a broader spectrum of needs today that requires a review of the process in which children are evaluated, needs determined and placement. With the budget crisis we are limited on hiring additional special educators. However, with the expansion of a nonprofit program we can look at further educating staff, working with parent groups to train volunteers to assist in schools and follow up at home. It is also important to have frequent school seminars to teach children about anti bullying, being kind to each other and older student mentoring.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Create better community outreach, enhance the website, create a student council to help promote kids interest and allow them an opportunity to help guide the school system. Expand the non-profit format to encompass more district schools and disperse the funding by requests made through a separate board. If we need to compromise with developers for funding or classrooms, then we need to ensure that it would be very affordable and under the school control to ensure district kids are being accommodated. Finding alternatives with unused or underused school properties that could generate revenue for the long term.



**Candidate Name:** Neisha Louhar

**Ballot Position:** 8D

**Slate (if applicable):**

**Term length sought:** ☒ Three-year ☐ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

Mental health services are essential in schools. There should be a mental health practitioner in every school, not only for students but for parents, teachers, and staff as well. Mental health services should be provided before, during, and after school. A healthy school is a safe school. There should be more special education classes. Students should not have to be bussed out to the other side of town. I would also like to update the curriculum to add basic skills, for example, opening a bank account, and filling out an application. It is essential to do a needs assessment per school and work on the funding formula. *[Answer shortened.]*

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

Mental health services, full-time nurses, and Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Students cannot progress if they do not have someone in their schools who are trained to attend to issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. There must be a full-time nurse in every school, in the case of an emergency and to distribute medication. There also needs to be a stronger line of communication where parents receive a response within 48 or 72 hours.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

Assess and change the funding formula. As stated, all funding for JC schools should go into JC schools for JC students. We need to assess where every cent is going. Funding should not be used unnecessarily.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

As stated above, classes available in all schools with teachers who are not only trained but have patience and who earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

There has to be more parent involvement and more communication. Parents should be introduced to the roles they can take as soon as the first day of school, during pick up, drop off and parent nights. There should also be various ways communication can occur — for example, phone, email, face-to-face. I think an open-door policy is essential for parents. Issues should be made public, so if there is anyone with the same concerns, they can be a part of the solution.

**Candidate Name:** Sonia N. Cintron

**Ballot Position:** 1E

**Slate (if applicable):** Independent

**Term length sought:** ☐ Three-year ☒ One-year

**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education?**

I am running for the Board of Education because there is a need for funding to build new schools, to repair and to eliminate the wasteful expenditures which continue to exacerbate an existing problem, funding. The growth of the population, which has not been addressed, is reflected in larger classroom sizes, with limited adequate space, and limited supplies to effectively teach students. The current BOE members and their budget constraints throughout the school district have left teacher and families with out of pocket expenses due to lack of funding and with no effective planning in sight.

**Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I grew up in Jersey City; and like my children my education started here in Jersey City. I have seen the changes and the challenges in our public school system especially in my district. The residents are faced with higher taxes in low income neighborhoods while the realtor's and their corporations continue to invest in the very same school districts which affords them years of abatements. They are not paying their fair share of taxes and instead continue to perpetuate the cycle of underfunding schools. I would challenge the state and the corporations to ameliorate these discrepancies.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

The biggest challenges facing the district are the taxes; it is stifling the growth of our economy. The more taxes are raised the less residents can afford their children supplies for school. It will have little to no effect in repairing the damage that has been done. Limiting the amount of school testing, capping the superintendent salary, while seeking to limit expenditures and invest in city owned lots. There is an expected significant amount of growth monetarily and in population; however there are not enough public schools and that is of great concern especially if the schools are in much need of repairs.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

There have been talks about "selling" the Board of Education, "\$6 million" and nothing has come close to a huge mistake. To alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded I would consider leasing space, there are about 8 floors where the BOE resides and I would utilize 7 floors by leasing them out while reserving 1 floor for the Board of Education. Charter schools have to be factor in when it comes to leasing, most Catholics schools have had to close down because of limited resources, and now space is available for charters to rent.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

To improve special education and treatment of children with special needs is a matter of who is qualified for the job. Not all teachers specialize in areas where the intellectually challenged student can benefit. Some of the classrooms have to be designed for special needs children and hire those who are best qualified to do the job. Teachers should also have works shops to keep up with the latest tools offered to them to improve their skills in identifying those with special needs, online tutorials offer solutions and a very convenient way for teachers to be informed if they cannot attend a workshop.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

To prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools communication is very important, I have seen from the current board a rush to disclose information before the people have had a chance to entertain an idea of what might possibly happen in the near future in their neighborhoods. And by failing to open the lines of communication these parents, students, educators and the general public were left wondering how this will affect their daily lives. I would take a poll from each district so that they can share their own ideas on what would work moving forward.

**Candidate Name:** Gina Verdibello

**Ballot Position:** 2E

**Slate (if applicable):** Education Matters

**Term length sought:** ☐ Three-year ☒ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

As a mother of three children that attend the schools in this district and as a Parent Advocate, I am fighting to make sure our schools are the best they can be. I started my journey in 2013 when I attended my first JCBOE meeting and asked for sibling preference for the district. It eventually passed. I am qualified for many reasons: mainly being an active parent, I have attended many meetings whether they be local or at the state level, I know how the board operates from attending so many meetings, and because I care.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

The biggest issue I see other than funding is overcrowded schools. Currently the district busses six busses of children that attend PS16 in Pre-k 4 and Kindergarten to the old PS20 on Danforth. We are spending too much money on bussing and parents want to be able to connect with the teachers. I want to create a committee with parents and community to discuss how we can solve this issue. I have an idea of reusing one of our schools as an elementary school. We need a school now and we can't wait for one to be built.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

I have always believed in being creative when trying to obtain money. We passed a resolution recently for a grant writer and for a foundation to be formed so that we can accept donations and have galas to raise money. I also believe we can rent some of the space we don't use at the current BOE offices. There are floors that are empty. Of course we can increase the payroll tax to 2%. These are some ways we can offset some of the money we need.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

I am very familiar with the parents and the special Education Dept. They have been welcoming and the parents from the SEPAC group invite the board members to attend their meetings. At the last board meeting we passed the Special Education audit to see where we can improve. It's definitely something I will prioritize.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

Currently I head the committee for Parents and Community. I started doing this in March 2019 after I was appointed in February 2019. In these meetings, we discuss many of the issues that occur in the district. I'm trying to alleviate as many issues as I can. I'm very open and honest with parents. I believe I connect with them because I'm going through the same things that they are. I bring in speakers from the district to talk to them whether the subject is about Title I, Security or CASPAR. I really want to continue these meetings in the future.

**Candidate Name:** LeKendrick Shaw

**Ballot Position:** 3E

**Slate (if applicable):** Education Matters

**Term length sought:** ☐ Three-year ☒ One-year

**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

As a JC Public School graduate I am running for Board Education Trustee to show the children of Jersey City the opportunities that are available in their future when they succeed in the Jersey City Public School System. Also ,my blend of professional experience within the areas of Problem solving , economic development and leadership makes me qualified to continue to serve.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

The biggest challenge I see at this particular moment besides funding is the property infrastructure issues. One way I would help address infrastructure issues during my term is I would continue to make sure that we advocate for more infrastructure funding at the state level as the current long-term infrastructure facilities plan is underfunded by approximately 1 Billion.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

I intend to look at cost saving measures to ensure that additional money can be found to help offset any loss in funding. In addition, I want to look at partnerships around facilities both internally and externally as operational cost are a critical component to helping bring funding to adequacy levels.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

One way I will contribute to the special education department is continue to monitor the vision for special education and advocate for quality services for parents and students. I recently voted yes to approve an audit to help determine where we could improve operations.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

One way to prioritize transparency for the groups mentioned is to recognize everyone is a equal stakeholder and partner and no one is below or above the table of organization. Often times that could not be the case as ideas and ideologies can differ and that could cause one group to alienate another I think to prioritize transparency you have to have a system that recognizes everyone no matter what opinion they may have.

**Candidate Name:** Anthony Sharperson

**Ballot Position:** 4E

**Slate (if applicable):** Change for Children

**Term length sought:** ☐ Three-year ☒ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

I love Jersey City and embarrassed by the current lack of direction and unethical leadership, and potentially criminal acts by some of the board members. It is time to restore sanity, professionalism, and a "Children First" philosophy back to JCBOE. My sense of devotion to the children goes way back to my time as a substitute teacher with Jersey City Public Schools and an Assistant Football Coach at Henry Snyder High School. I know the huge problems plaguing our children's school system. I want to set a clear path to success for the 30,000 children, including college prep and vocational skill-building.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

We need to solve facilities and administration needs within the schools from lack of basic necessities from accessing clean water, dilapidated facilities, to understaffed teachers with overcrowded classrooms. We would work with the superintendent and facilities director to tackle these issues head-on, and looking at other avenues to tap into new revenue streams.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

The City and School Board should always make every effort to collaborate. Funding problems will not solve themselves. We believe the crisis will not be resolved until the JCBOE, the City and County officials take an "all hands on deck" approach. And most importantly, not turn away any funding, as the current board did, and then proceeded to file for state aid.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

I have been very involved with the community and believe it is vital to involve the parents and teachers to understand the specific needs of our children better. As a team, we will work with all critical parties to ensure we provide state of the art education for special needs children in the district, including understanding teacher's feedback when working with the unique needs of a child.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

We need to restore sanity in the JCBOE. We need to be transparent to our community when it comes to financial audit reports, facility updates, and community engagement. Our best feedback comes from our parents, teachers, and community to improve our school systems. Keeping all minute's post-meetings updated and available within a reasonable time frame and providing it in various languages is critical to maintains open lines of communications.

**Candidate Name:** David Czehut

**Ballot Position:** 5E

**Slate (if applicable):** Change for Children

**Term length sought:** ☐ Three-year ☒ One-year



**Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?**

As a parent and concerned community member, I am here to make transformative changes that will positively impact our children. My background is in finance, operations, and technology. With the financial crisis we are experiencing and my financial background, it is imperative we conduct a full forensic audit approach to understand. The education level is not up to par throughout Jersey City. We need to identify the schools and work with the school to strategy on the right solution to succeed.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the district (other than funding) and how would you address these issues during your term?**

We need to change the way the Board is run by working closely with the new facilities director, superintendent, and city officials to establish metrics based on school building audit reports. The published reports will help prioritize the issues and makes us accountable to the children and parents. If elected, we will create new policies, guaranteeing the facilities director provides daily or weekly update reports. In the end, we, as a board, will identify priorities, provide transparency to the districts, and become accountable for the needs of the community.

**The Jersey City Public Schools are facing a worsening fiscal crisis. According to the state funding formula, our district is currently more than \$100 million underfunded and we will be losing approximately an additional \$25 million each year for the next 5 years. What are your plans to alleviate this crisis and ensure that our schools are fully funded to adequacy levels going forward?**

We believe a comprehensive financial audit is required and the analysis shared with the community. Collaboration with the superintendent, principals, and facilities director is critical to access the school needs, as well as work with city officials in identifying new funds to be allocated to our schools. These include the 1% payroll tax, abatement pilot money, and a mandate to companies benefiting from our community to contribute to our schools. We also need to look into community reinvestments to benefit our children and improve the school system. We need to be strategic and creative to help close the funding gap.

**How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?**

The first thing we must do is to engage with the parents, teachers, and principals to better access what is lacking in the schools, supplies, teacher support, and equipment to improve the quality of education for special needs children. Every child requires distinct needs, and it is our job to ensure these children receive the best opportunities in our schools. We should consider conducting an audit of each school to better understand the true needs of each school, but also share it with the parents and community.

**How do you plan to prioritize transparency for parents, students, educators, and the general public about issues affecting the Jersey City Public Schools?**

We advocate for full transparency on all board meetings, with community members from different backgrounds. We believe in more inclusive and interactive board meetings by hosting meetings from the Heights to the South Side. It is equally important to have translators onsite to ensure every parent understands and has a voice in the meetings. As a board, we want every child to succeed, all teachers to be recognized, and parents to stay in the know. The current board organized a meeting on Halloween at 6pm.