Board of Education Candidates Forum 2013



Hosted by the Milford PTA Council

Brian Smith, Moderator

October 23, 2013
7:00 p.m.

Jonathan Law High School
20 Lansdale Avenue
Milford, CT 06460

Milford PTA Council
2013 – 2014 Officers

President ..... Carol Thomas
1st Vice President ..... Meg Greene
2nd Vice President .....Lise Robinson
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John F. Kennedy PTO ..... Jeannette Walsh, Diane Lickteig
Live Oaks PTA ..... Staci Godek
Mathewson PTA .....Sherri Franzman
Meadowside PTA.....Chris Thomas
Orange Avenue PTA ..... Circe Deitelbaum
Orchard Hills PTA.....Kathy Elson
Pumpkin Delight PTA .....Donna Garlock

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

East Shore Middle School PTA ..... Liz Alfano, Michele Clark
Harborside Middle School PTO.....Elizabeth Capobianco
West Shore Middle School PTA .....Sharon Paredes

HIGH SCHOOLS

One Voice High School PTSA..... Melissa Wunder, Sheila Pugliese

We are pleased to announce the *BOE Candidates Forum* will be televised on Milford Government Access Television, (MGAT) Channel 78, on Cablevision.

The Candidates

	Democratic Party	Republican Party
1st District	Mark Ahrens	Mike DeGrego
	Laura Fetter	John DeRosa
2nd District	Tracy Casey	Joyce Charney
	Susan Glennon	Doreen Fontana
3rd District	George Gensure	Tom Jagodzinski
	Chris Saley	Anthony Piselli
4th District	Heidi Gold-Dworkin	Walter Cash
	Earl Whiskeyman	Heinz Stock
5th District	Sarah Ferrante	Suzanne DiBiase
	Laura Fucci	Ray Kirmaier

Richard Smith, Democratic Town Committee Chair
Paul Beckwith, Republican Town Committee Chair

Program Format

Written questions were submitted by Milford's PTA/O groups in advance. All questions were screened by a panel of the Milford PTA Council to ensure the questions pertain to the role of a Board of Education member.

Forum will begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. The rules will be reviewed. Candidates will have one minute to introduce themselves and provide a personal statement. Moderator will read a brief statement from any candidate unable to attend. **25 min**.

The program will proceed as follows:

- Candidates will have three minutes to answer the question asked of them. One warning bell will ring when 15 seconds remain, two bells when time is up.
- Two candidate names will be randomly chosen from a 'hat.'
- A question will be randomly selected, and asked of the first candidate picked. The same question will then be asked of the second candidate.
- The process will continue, with two additional names drawn and the same question asked of both, until all candidates have answered one question.
- A second round will then take place, following the same process. **90 min**.
- Time allowing, we may offer each candidate the opportunity to offer a one-minute closing statement.

There will be **NO** verbal interaction between the audience and the candidates during the forum.

NO CAMPAIGN LITERATURE is to be distributed. NO BUTTONS or campaign promotions are to be worn, etc. This forum is neutral territory for a sharing of philosophy, ideas and information, NOT CAMPAIGNING.

Doors will open at 6:45 p.m.

End approximately 9:15

FIRST DISTRICT



Mark Ahrens (D), 1st District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I want to provide leadership and be a catalyst around a simple, but profound idea--that Milford schools operate in a culture of excellence. Our expectation of excellence needs to extend beyond student performance, which has recently plateaued. We must strive for excellence across every element of the school system, including teachers and administrators, our sports teams and school clubs. Levels of parental engagement must be improved, and outreach to the broader Milford community made better. Today, Milford schools are not consistently performing at this level of excellence. Tomorrow, working with a sense of urgency and purpose, they can be. As a member of the Board of Education, and as a parent of a Milford public school student, I will play an active role in establishing the culture of excellence that Milford citizens have every reason to expect.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
The single-minded focus of the BoE should be on student outcomes; preparing Milford students to excel in college and careers. As such, the job entails strategic activities such as establishing policies and overseeing the budget. However, I believe the job entails much more than that. An effective BoE member needs to be an active advocate for their district's constituents, they need to ask tough, but fair-minded questions of the school administrators, and demand time-sensitive action plans when change is warranted. An effective BoE member will take it upon themselves to visit schools, talk to parents, teachers and administrators alike, and immerse themselves in educational policy with an eye towards bringing fresh new ideas and approaches to today's challenges. In essence, the BoE job means doing anything and everything needed to deliver a world class education to Milford's students.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
With over 30 years of business experience and now as the business owner of Mathnasium, I understand how to break down the budgetary process into its controllable and uncontrollable elements. I understand the need to do more with less. I am experienced in analyzing expenditures and will ensure that monies are being spent for the direct benefit of Milford's students. The current budgetary process is complex and, as such, can appear muddled and confusing to Milford's taxpayers. As a BoE member, I will work to bring

transparency and broad-based communication to this process. A newly-passed CT law, called the Uniform Chart of Accounts, will require all Boards of Education in the state to report their budgets on an "apples-to-apples" basis so that budgets can be easily compared across districts and across time. I will work to ensure the speedy implementation of this new requirement.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help work to overcome it?
The biggest challenge facing Milford schools is the need to develop a strong and effective support system for Milford's teachers that enhances the morale and pride of Milford's teacher community. New educational standards and evaluation systems are being implemented and teachers' times are being compressed to cover an ever-increasing set of non-academic requirements. All of these initiatives can chip away at their enthusiasm. Yet, at the end of the day, teachers are the group delivering the curriculum and educating our children, where the "rubber meets the road" to borrow a phrase. Re-invigorating teachers' collective sense of purpose, cohesion, and devotion to a cause will necessarily include both soft and tangible changes. I believe this process starts with inspirational leaders. We need to make sure that all of Milford's educational leaders possess a positive, can-do attitude and the requisite management skills to replicate those traits to the teachers in their charge. We need to foster informal collaborative groups, both within and beyond Milford, to easily share best practice ideas. We need to recognize teachers throughout the year who have "gone above and beyond" or received positive parent/student feedback. We need to embrace the broader Milford community or foundations looking to fund needed professional development (PD). Just as importantly, however, I will speak with teachers to better understand the constraints and aspirations of their job. I believe these and other ideas will enhance teacher enthusiasm and performance in the classroom and, therefore, provide better student outcomes.



Laura Fetter (D), 1st District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I would like to raise the bar in Milford. To help my friends and neighbors advocate and develop an education system in Milford we are proud of. Working collaboratively with the community, its leaders and teachers to develop strategies and set goals that will make us one of the best school systems in Connecticut. A school system that addresses and provides the key pillars of college and career readiness, helps and ensures that

every child will be successful; and adapts best practices from effective teachers and top performing schools.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.

I believe the job entails, but is not limited to:

- developing a fiscally responsible budget and protecting the resources available.
- carrying out the mission of monitoring and directing the activities of the Milford Public School system on behalf of all Milford residents by reaching out and working with the community and those directly affected by the policies and decisions of the BOE.
- establishing guidelines and policies that are used to operate the school district.
- working with the superintendent to ensure the goals of the entire district are met.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?

Whether it is $1 or $1 billion dollars, I understand that a budget needs to be administered with sound fiduciary responsibility. Throughout my career and work on non-profit boards I have been responsible for all different size budgets and clearly understand this responsibility. My work experience in the financial services industry and MBA in business makes me knowledgeable and comfortable in working and making decisions pertaining how money is spent and where we can get the most value for our money, without sacrificing services and negatively impacting our student's learning.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?

The biggest challenge facing Milford's school system (MPS) is closing the achievement gap. MPS needs to develop a clear consistent vision for all levels of learners. MPS continues to perpetuate the achievement gap which is evident in the CMT and CAPT results, as well as the Special Education audit. In order for us to meet this challenge we need to work together as a community and have honest, open discussions with not only experts in the field of learning but also include all members of the community, parents, business leaders and students. At the end of the day we all have a vested interest in the outcome of our students' education, and to help guide all our children to become productive citizens, not only future leaders, but contributing members in society. The steps I have taken and will continue to take is to be involved in my child's learning as a parent and exemplify "best practices", share these "best practices with the school and teachers. I will continue to advocate for all children of all abilities and raise expectations, encourage and promote education as the best investment that we can give our children, and continue my work with the Milford Education Foundation and the Board of Education.



Mike DeGrego (R), 1st District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am a current Board of Education Member whose passion is rooted in seeing that our children are afforded the best education our community can provide. As a teacher I have intimate knowledge of what our students need to be successful. Our children have dreams of being successful in life, and education is critical to make those dreams a reality. My passion for helping our children accomplish that is the same as the passion that led me to become a teacher, and my experience in the armed forces and the police department allows me to help our children become more civic-minded and use our American History as the basic foundation upon which they can build their lives. I have a passion for the growth and success of our children.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
In short the job requires listening with an open mind At bi-monthly Board meetings and additionally as needed, we listen to the students report from Law and Foran High Schools. We listen to teachers, administrators, city officials, attorneys, outside contractors, parents, and the public. On each issue the board carefully listens to the community and each other, before discussing the topic and ultimately reaching a decision, which we subsequently monitor for effectiveness. Additionally, I believe a Board Member is expected to attend school functions to discern what is being accomplished in the school community which allows us to act on the board based on those needs.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
As a Retired Master Sergeant in the Air Force I worked alongside the Chief Master Sergeant of Base Supply. I served as a technical advisor to the Base Utilization Board as well as the Equipment Review and Authorization Activity (ERRA) Board to monitor and control multi-million dollar accounts involved the acquisition and disbursement of obligated funds. The work included cost-benefit analysis, preparation of fiscal budge estimate and supervising personnel initiating all documentation and processing of office inquiries. In the Air Force we were always mindful of "FWA" (fraud, waste and abuse,) and I carry that mindset to this day.

On a personal level, from a young age my parents would share stories of growing up during the financial hardship of the Great Depression, and those stories were a guide that have helped me lead a fiscally responsible life that avoids wasting assets or resources.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford School System and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
Challenges are always present where education is concerned--meeting state and federal mandates, finding adequate funding for needed programs, making sure buses run on time, keeping up on maintenance of buildings. All worthy matters; however, today the discussion in our community has been on safety, especially safety in and around schools. I am saddened that this is the topic on the minds of our community, it shouldn't be, but with that said, it is a real concern. As a Board of Education member, I worked with our Board and Administration to find a resolution that would be sustainable--and out of that work came the SRO (School Resource Officer) program that was implemented this year in our high schools and middle schools as well as the Greeter program at our elementary schools. Along with feeling safe from "outside" fears/harms, our students should feel safe from "inside" fears--bullying! I can't tell you how many parents have spoken to me asking what they can do for their child whom they believe is being bullied. As a Board member this infuriates me--all of our students should feel safe in all aspects of the school environment and that should also stretch to outside of the school setting. I want to go farther than "bullying boxes" in schools (which are seldom used by victims). Bullying is a community problem and the school district should play a large role in educating our community on bullying issues, supporting the implementation of effective strategies to address bullying, and partnering with non-profits that can help send the message--BULLYING WILL NOT BE TOLERATED in Milford! As a Board of Education member, I will work to make this a priority focus of the board and administration--the community wants it--the children deserve it!



John DeRosa (R), 1st District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am a lifelong resident of this great city of Milford and a product of the Milford Education system. Though I graduated from the system more than 30 years ago, my two children have gone through the system and have since gone onto Post-secondary education.

I am currently an Associate Professor at Quinnipiac University for more than 10 years and understand what kind of student it takes to be successful at a Post High School Education. Knowing what it takes to be successful in the classroom - I am a ***"teacher"*** at heart and I feel with my experiences, knowledge, and understanding of education it was and is time to give back in a greater way to my community. Our Education system today faces many challenges ranging from meeting the individual education needs of every child; addressing a growing population of special needs; and trying to keep the physical buildings our children attend safe and comfortable. Being a by-product of this system my background and experience provides a valuable

combination to deal with these issues and the many others addressing the board.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
Working with the Superintendent to keep education goals obtainable and achievable while maintaining fiscal responsibility, bringing new ideas and concepts to challenge the education system to provide a better and more efficient way of teaching, for example by using more technology in our classrooms and providing remote learning opportunities…

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I have worked for a major international manufacturing company based in Connecticut for more than 17 years and have had numerous opportunities to handle multimillion dollar projects during my career. Several of these projects involved managing the direct budgets and the knowledge systems (facilities, utilities, workspace, and technology) affecting more than 6000 people. My direct experience enables me to view the current operating budget in a manner that demonstrates efficiency in spending and budgeting; and proficiency to ensure projects are completed on time and within the defined budget.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
The biggest challenge facing our school system is the current design structure of the education system. Currently, the system is configured in a K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 categories. The Administration is a projecting a 10 year period of decreasing enrollment while at the same time asking the taxpayers of Milford to fund a system with at least 50% of their tax dollars to support a system that is not designed to meet the current or future needs of our children (i.e. supporting physical buildings that are continuing to show their wear and tear). If we looked at the approach of introducing the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) or STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) based curriculum and partnered with local universities, businesses, and service organizations we can offer our children and parents a better investment in education at the same time provide a more well-rounded education experience for the children to prepare them for their future successes.

SECOND DISTRICT

Tracy Casey (D), 2nd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
My past six years on the Board of Education have been both rewarding and challenging, and I have been privileged to serve as the Chairman for the past two years. There is significant change occurring in the Milford Public Schools – due to both changing federal/state requirements as well as Milford-

specific priorities that include a proactive Long Range Planning study and a special education audit. I would like to serve on the Board of Education for another term to continue my efforts on these and all Board of Education initiatives, working to increase student achievement for all, providing opportunities to help our students reach their goals both in and outside of the classroom and ultimately making Milford Public Schools the best.



2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you feel the job entails.

The Board of Education operates under a structure called Policy Governance. This structure defines the work of the Board through 25 Governance Policies that are posted on the Milford Public Schools website. In general, they provide Milford's mission toward academic achievement, the issues the Board agrees to pursue and how the Board works together as a legislative body. Critical components of being an effective Board member are understanding Board policy/legislative requirements, being prepared and committing to doing all of the work necessary, both during regular Board meetings and additional focused meetings, such as grievances, workshops (i.e. budget) and managing time-sensitive issues that arise. I commit to continuing to make all Board responsibilities a priority, as I have done during my six years as a Board member.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?

As a corporate professional, I have over 20 years of experience and responsibility for managing multi-million dollar budgets and am mid-way through completing my Masters in Business Administration. My experience and coursework includes the importance of high ethical responsibility. Additionally, in my six years of being on the Board of Education, I have worked hard to ensure that the Board of Education budget is fiscally responsible and the highest percentage of funds be spent for the direct benefit of our children. I am proud to say that the budgets presented in the two years I have been Chairman have had the lowest increases in the past ten years.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?

I believe that the biggest challenge facing the MPS is the concurrent implementation of new federal and state regulations: the common core curriculum, student testing program (SBAC) and teacher and administration evaluation systems. Each of these on its own requires substantive change; however, implementing all four at the same time will take significant care, attention and resource. Disruption to student learning is unacceptable and

consistent with Board policy; each student's success must remain foremost in the minds of all. I believe the Board's direction and oversight is critical for MPS to be successful. The Board must keep its focus on the objective of these new regulations – increased student achievement, debate and allocate associated budgeting needs and ensure appropriate measurements are in place. I commit to ensuring this important work is continued by the Board.



Susan Glennon (D), 2nd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am seeking re-election to the Board of Education so I may continue to work on initiatives begun during my first term, helping the school district move forward, with a focus on excellence. My children are a product of Milford Public Schools. I am a small business owner with a focus on early childhood education. I value the importance of great public schools and understand the impact a school system has on our community. I think I can continue to make a valuable contribution to the Board and want to help give the children of Milford the best public school education possible.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
The day to day operation of our school system is managed by the superintendent, who is the Board of Education's only employee. Through board goals, policies and the adoption of a reasonable budget that reflects the needs of the school system and the community at large, the Board leads the school district, through the superintendent, as it reviews and oversees her work. I feel it's my responsibility to attend all board meetings, prepared and ready to participate; to ask questions so I have a clear understanding of the matters at hand and so I am able to discuss with members of the public issues that may arise. I believe a good board member is a team player who can work with fellow board members and school leadership to achieve a common goal and who can keep an open mind as issues evolve and are resolved.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
The many years I attended Board of Education meetings and budget workshops, while my children were in school here, gave me a good basis for understanding the budget process. As the head of my household, a business owner, and an active participant in PTA where I served on numerous executive boards at the school, city and state-wide levels, I have been responsible for the development and management of numerous budgets.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
There are several challenges faces our school system right now, all of which are important.

- **Implementing the Common Core State Standards and new teacher and administrator evaluation plans.** While implementation of these initiatives ultimately fall to staff, the Board will play an important role by supporting these initiatives with proper funding for professional development, technology, and other related expenses.

- **Addressing declining standardized test scores** – I believe standardized test scores are just one indicator of student achievement and are a snapshot of a few days out of 180. I believe in the importance of a strong home-school connection and that parents and schools work together to help students grow. The Board, by maintaining strong goals and high expectations for excellence in all areas of the school system, sets the tone for the district and, along with addressing budgetary needs of common core and new testing, must ultimately hold the superintendent accountable for its successes and failures.

- **Addressing declining enrollment and aging buildings -** We must have a proactive plan to address declining student enrollment over the next 5-10 years. I am currently one of two board members serving on the Long Range Planning Committee which was created for this very reason. We are examining and evaluating data and options and expect to have recommendations for the Board of Education in early spring 2014. I would very much like the opportunity to complete this work!



Joyce Charney (R), 2nd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
One of the reasons I would like to be on the Board of Education is to broaden the communication between the Board and the citizens of Milford. The communication between the schools and parents has developed over the past few years into a very useful tool. However, the communication from the Board of Education has not developed as well. Decisions are made and then communicated to the public. Not all citizens fully understand why and how the changes are helpful to the students and tax payers. This needs to change. As a board member it should be an obligation to every citizen to give a better understanding of actions taken with their tax dollars. Everyone involved should understand changes prior to implementation.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
This job requires an open mind when making decisions that will affect students, teachers and tax payers. Also, your commitment has to be solid in order to properly execute your duties and to be able to act in the best interest of all stakeholders.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I feel that I am qualified to administer an $89 million budget with my work experience and education. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of New Haven. I have been an employee in the finance department at Sikorsky Aircraft for the past thirty years. Over the past thirty years I have been involved with timekeeping, payroll and accounts payable.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
One of the biggest challenges for the school system is the pressure put on the teachers and students in regards to standardized tests. Even with the apparent emphasis on preparation for standard tests, test scores have not been as high as expected. Teachers have had to focus on preparing the students for the tests, sacrificing class room time. It is my belief that more time should be spent teaching the regular curriculum to better prepare students for their future.



Doreen Fontana (R), 2nd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am running for a position on the Board of Education in order to ensure that the Board provides a quality education for all students: regular, special education and alternative program students. I will bring an open-minded perspective as a parent of a child currently attending the Milford Public Schools, a parent of a recent Jonathan Law High School graduate, and as a Special Education Teacher. Our children deserve the best education possible and as a Board of Education member I would always consider first and foremost what is in the best interest of the child. I believe in public school education and would be honored to serve as a member of the Milford Board of Education.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
A member of the Board of Education plays an integral part of determining the best course of action to take in educating our children. This includes, but is not limited to, developing and adopting policies for the school district and approving and adopting the budget. Board of Education members should advocate for ALL students and work together with teachers, administrators,

and the community to ensure our children are getting the services and tools needed to become productive members of society.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
What qualifies me to administer an $89million dollar budget is simple—I am a taxpayer who like many in our community wants our tax dollars to be spent wisely and want our education system to be one full of success stories. As a teacher, I know what is and isn't needed in the classroom without compromising the integrity of programs and will use that knowledge to prioritize district needs. I want what the community wants—a system where dollars are directed to the education and success of our students and one that can be measured by those successes.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it.
The biggest challenge facing our school system is its current organization. The K-5 structure split buildings, and families, into a K-2 and 3-5 structure that is not conducive to an effective learning environment. Every three years our children are moving on to the next school. As a result, there is loss of consistency for students, a loss of attending their neighborhood school, a decrease in families joining their PTAs and loss of community. We need to get back to the K-5 structure where students in the upper grades can be mentors to younger students, where siblings are together in one building as opposed to being split among various schools, and children are able to walk to their neighborhood school instead of being bussed.

THIRD DISTRICT



Chris Saley (D), 3rd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I believe that all the citizens of Milford should try to volunteer some time to their city to help better our community. If we could get every single resident of Milford to donate some of their time and expertise, I think we would have a stronger community. I choose the Board of Education because I have two children in the Milford schools and I know how important education is to our children and our communities. I believe we need to continue to push the administration to improve our educational system in our town.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
I believe that the Board of Education's job entails setting policy and procedures for the superintendent to implement in the school systems so that we can continue to improve our children's education. Part of this oversight should be putting a plan in place that looks forward both in the short term (1 to 2 years) and in the longer term (5-15 years) to address current and future problems and concerns that will arise in the school systems.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
My qualifications are pretty diverse. I worked as a teamster for about three years, which gave me a very good understanding of how unions work including contracts, grievances, disciplinary procedures, arbitration and terminations. I also have over fifteen years experience as a manager in both a for-profit and a not-for-profit business with oversight of over 50 employees and a direct budget of over $2 million and was intimately involved in running a $27 million a year company. Finally, as a general contractor and business owner I understand the importance of proper planning and budgeting for both seen and unforeseen problems that will arise. I have very conservative financial values and I believe that you don't spend your way out of problems; instead you plan properly and spend efficiently to improve our school system.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
I think there have been a few problems that I've seen over my last 2 years on the Board of Education. But my number one concern would be the lack of planning and sense of urgency over the last 20 years for a long-term plan of where our school system is going. We seem to react to problems as they occur instead of being proactive. An example would be the reconfiguration of the schools 3 ½ years ago, which seemed to be a budget decision instead of what's best for the school system and it's future. If we had planned properly we would have seen this problem of declining enrollment years ahead and could have had more time to make a better decision as to how to address that problem. Now in the fall of 2013, we continue to have declining enrollment and we need to revisit the reconfiguration issue. This will be a difficult task, but we need to redistrict appropriately so as to not overcrowd one school and allocate resources appropriately so that all students have an equal chance at success. Politicians have to have the intestinal fortitude and a sense of urgency to make the necessary tough decisions that will face us in the coming years.

George Gensure (D), 3rd District



No submission received.



Tom Jagodzinski (R), 3rd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I believe we have a moral obligation to provide our students with the best possible education and that the future of our city depends on the quality of our schools. At a recent Board meeting there was a presentation on the Advanced Placement classes offered at our high schools. The teachers who presented were professional and enthusiastic. The presenting students were bright and articulate with a clear love of learning. I want that enthusiasm for teaching to be present in every classroom, and I want our students to have the love of learning those students clearly embraced. It is up to the board to set high expectations for all (the board, administration, staff, parents and students). Our students and community deserve it. I'm excited by the opportunity to help make our schools even better.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
The Board of Education must set the vision for the district based on the needs of our students and our community, follow up with policies and support structures to implement that vision and hold the administration accountable for implementing those policies. Board members must be accessible to our students, parents and taxpayers who may be concerned about what's happening in our schools and be able to guide and assist them in dealing with issues they may have. Everyone will always know why I vote the way I do. I believe that part of the job of any elected official is to be transparent in the work they do.

3) What qualifies your to administer an $89 million budget?
As a retired Senior Vice President of a major Connecticut based bank, I've had extensive experience creating and managing multi-million dollar budgets and managing hundreds of employees with a wide variety of skills. Prior to joining the bank, I worked as a technology consultant to a variety of organizations including a university, state and local governments, manufacturers and various types of banks. Over the past decade, I have become intimately familiar with our local government and the process of budgeting both on the city and school side.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
I believe that our schools should provide all our students with the tools and skills they need to pursue their dreams. Our high schools are the critical last step before students go on to college or a job. After attending numerous meetings where academic measurements have been discussed, it's become clear that our high schools are underperforming our grammar and middle schools. Why is this happening? Is it policy? Curriculum? Structure? Outside factors? The Board needs to review what's working and not working and enact changes that will improve education for all our high school students.



Anthony Piselli (R), 3rd District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
What I have found in my many years volunteering with the Scouts and working with our young people is that communication is key to understanding what is expected or desired, especially the listening side of communication. I have listened to the voices of friends, co-workers and parents in our community and believe that I have an understanding of what they want our school district to look like and what they expect from this district in academic opportunities, extra-curricular activities, and athletics. I want to serve as their elected representative and give back to Milford by helping to shape what education looks like in Milford with my best hopes that it will serve our children well and give them choices when they graduate.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
Listen, listen, listen, and then take action. The Board of Education makes decisions on budgets, sets policies, reviews curriculum recommendations, sets the tone for the district, and acts as the voice of the people among other things. These decisions should not be made lightly nor without listening to the stakeholders—parents, teachers, and yes, students. Also, board members need to be approachable and ready to help those with concerns get answers to their questions.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I have 16 years of outside municipal experience navigating budgets, deadlines, and government requirements. And, I believe in and practice with my own finances that you don't spend what you don't have. As a Board of Education member I believe that I owe to those whom I represent a fiscally responsible approach to budgeting and I will work to see that we utilize our resources in the most effective way to deliver services. It is a delicate balance, but with open, transparent conversations it can be done.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
Our structure—we lack educational continuity at the elementary level and I believe that we need to return to neighborhood schools i.e. the K-5 system. Our current system has too many transitions, requires our families to be "invested" in two school communities. Parents were not, are not, happy with the current structure (sure they work around it) and other districts who tried this have reverted back to a more traditional elementary structure. I will work with the Board of Education to take steps to return our system to a K-5 system.

FOURTH DISTRICT



Heidi Gold-Dworkin (D), 4th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I support the best possible education system that prepares students for careers and/or college in the global 21st century.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
Being on the Board of Education entails working together with the 9 other members of the board to set effective and appropriate policies, oversee the budget, and work together with the superintendent to ensure the students in Milford are receiving the best educational opportunities.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I am the CEO of 3 corporations and I oversee their budgets and finances. I am honest, intelligent, and dedicated to what is best for milford's students.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
The global and economic achievement gap is the biggest challenge facing the Milford School System. I would work together with the other members of the board of education to use our resources in the most efficient and effective way to ensure that our education system prepares Milford's students to enter the best colleges and most competitive job markets.



Earl Whiskeyman (D), 4th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I believe that lifelong learning is a worthy pursuit. That journey should be nurtured in our earliest years and should continue throughout our lives. Supporting that effort requires dedication, focus and the resources necessary to provide a solid educational foundation for our youth.

A solid foundation in our youth's education best prepares the community for a healthy and prosperous future.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
There are three main things the board does. The board oversees the performance of the Superintendent, who manages the day-to-day operations of the district; sets policies for the management of the district; and, sets the budget proposal for the district which is reviewed by the Board of Finance and must be approved by the Board of Aldermen.

Board members are appointed by the Chair of the BOE to serve on or as a liaison to one or more other boards or groups within the community. I currently serve on the Board of Governors of ACES, the Regional Educational Services Center (RESC) as the Milford school district representative.

In addition, the board meets for workshops and hearings as required to review petitions and grievances.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
The board reviews the budget, delves into the details and makes adjustments to budget suggestions submitted by the district's administration. Since I have already done this, I have an understanding of this process. Prior to being on the BOE, I worked as a manager for a multi-billion dollar corporation with a departmental budget of several million dollars. During the last 5 years prior to retiring I helped prepare budget proposals at another school district where I worked as the IT director and

helped the finance manager prepare the spreadsheets and calculate the requirements for the budget for that district which was just over $50 million at that time.

Most of the budget dollars are expended for personnel. Salaries are the largest expenditure and there is little latitude for variation in that regard. Discretionary expenditures can sometimes be reduced or deferred, but one must be careful not to shortchange things like building maintenance for this year, only to incur much higher expenditures in the future. Careful consideration of both the immediate needs and the long term impacts of financial decisions is necessary for the best balance of both the district and the community's taxpayers.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
There are always special interests that want to pursue their own agenda as the only solution. I believe a balanced approach in education is both necessary and appropriate to maintaining a healthy educational environment that supports a broad spectrum of educational opportunities and encourages our youth to experience a wide variety of knowledge areas, including, of course, all the basic academics and some intense academics such as AP courses, as well as exposure to music, art, crafts, sports, and community service.



Walter Cash (R), 4th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am a longtime resident of Milford with three children and six grandchildren. Education is important to me. I want what others want—an educational system that has quality teachers in the classroom, provides challenging coursework for those who excel, and resources for those who need a bit more help. It is time for me to give back to our community and ensure that my grandchildren, our children, have the same opportunities afforded me by my education many years ago.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
This isn't rocket science. It is public education. Board of Education members need to represent those who put them there. This requires being aware of the needs of the district, visiting schools and classrooms, asking questions, listening to and educating oneself on matters of the budget, curriculum, policies, and legal requirements before making decisions that will impact the school system.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I am a taxpayer in the City of Milford. That should be enough, however, I do recognize that there is more to it than being a taxpayer. I think common sense prevails on this one—if a program isn't producing results (with adequate time for implementation) then future funding should be questioned. If test scores are not improving, then we need to do something different. Also, prioritize the budget based on the vision of the district—a vision that should reflect the desires of the citizens of Milford.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
Keeping up with and competing with technology certainly makes my list. Our district spends a whole boatload of money on the "latest" technology only to have it be obsolete before it gets into the classrooms—yet, at home kids have the latest and greatest. Maybe we stop spending in this area to the degree we spend and allow kids to bring their latest and greatest in. Oh, and that darn new elementary system. Parents (and grandparents) are not happy that our youngsters are split up—too many transitions—I personally think a K-8 system would fix a lot of this and other issues, but I would support returning to the K-5 programs of a few years ago.

Heinz Stock (R), 4th District



1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
As a longtime resident of this City, I am concerned about the future of Milford and our students. With declining enrollment and increasing costs it is important that the Board of Education find budget-friendly ways to meet the needs of our students. These needs are coupled with our desire for our children to excel in an increasingly competitive society is always present, which is why we need to prioritize and invest in the resources that are producing positive results.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
I believe that to be an effective board member the job would require one to be an effective communicator as well as an informed decision maker. The Board is charged with setting a vision for the district and I think that a good board member would call for community input prior to setting that vision or any policies to support the vision. I also believe that it requires leadership and an ability to work with others.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I have an engineering background and years estimating jobs, bringing them in or under cost, and following through with customers to make sure they are

satisfied with the job has prepared me to oversee the education budget. It has also prepared me to review and prioritize spending. Like the customers I work for in business, the customers of the education system (taxpayers, parents, students) should expect quality outcomes for their investment.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
We are not building widgets, some kids are college bound, others want to get a job and gain work experience, and then there are those who may choose another path. A quality education prepares our students for "their paths". Our challenge is making sure that the quality education that our district provides meets the needs of giving our students the tools to choose their path. We must ensure that our system doesn't become a cookie-cutter beholden to state and federal mandates that push teachers to "teach to the test", and treat students as if they are all at the same level at the same time. I want our teachers with support from parents/guardians to drive the bus; after all they are the closest to our children and know them better than some bureaucrat who is pushing the latest curriculum standard.

FIFTH DISTRICT



Laura Fucci (D), 5th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
Public education, the process of educating all children of all abilities and differences with the goal of preparing them for adulthood, is an essential component of democracy and self-government. I believe that there is more right than there is wrong with public education and I want to be a part of making it better.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
First and foremost, the job of a Board of Education member is to make informed decisions based on what's best for educating Milford students. Formally, the position is to work with the school administration to develop, implement and oversee the Milford Public School's policies and guidelines; to select, retain and evaluate the Superintendent of Schools; and to develop the budget in a fiscally responsible yet resource appropriate manner. Underlying each of those responsibilities is to facilitate and extend communication among the school community as well as the Milford community at large to engage in collaborative solutions to our educational challenges.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
Budgets are a reflection of our values and priorities. I will approach the budget process with the goal of ensuring that expenditures meet the criteria of 1) is it in the best interest of educating Milford's students and 2) is it the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars. If voters agree with my approach, then they will determine if I am qualified.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
The biggest challenge facing Milford Schools is providing a quality education for all students with diminishing resources and greater demands placed upon it to succeed. Most successful endeavors result from thoughtful and informed collaboration and communication across many points of view. It takes a community approach to solve large issues. No one person or group has all of the answers. I will research, question, listen and advocate for all students to receive the appropriate education that meets their needs.



Sarah Ferrante (D), 5th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
Milford's education system is at an exciting point. With the implementation of the Common Core Standards and the work of the Long Range Planning Committee, Milford schools are poised for incredible growth and achievement. I want to be on the Board of Education to help ensure that these opportunities for excellence are realized. Every student is entitled to a competitive and inspiring public education that will prepare him or her to be an active contributor to our global world. And, I am committed to ensuring that Milford students have a school system that will prepare and energize them to fulfill their potential and be world players.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
It is the job of the Board of Education to ensure that all students receive the highest quality public education. This means establishing guidelines and policies for achievement and wellbeing that, when fulfilled, make Milford students globally competitive. It also means administering finances and resources in an equitable, responsible way to ensure that all students have the opportunities and means to achieve.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
I work in non-profit development, so every day I am challenged with providing high quality services to the public while using finite funds. It is not unlike the Board of Education's obligation to prepare all students to achieve at their highest level within the financial constraints of the budget. Whatever the

budget size, responsible administration of funds is achieved by focusing on the mission. If all budget measures are evaluated for their efficacy in promoting student achievement, the Board can efficiently and responsibly administer funds.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
There is a lot of passion in Milford, in the teachers, the administration, the parents and the students. But passion needs continuity in order to grow and achieve. Milford schools have seen a lot of change in recent years, and I believe this is the biggest challenge facing the school system right now. I applaud the objectives of the Long Range Planning Committee, and I am excited to see the commitment to the Common Core Standards. These are both big picture endeavors that focus on the long-term, holistic needs of our students and community. On the Board of Education, I plan to support this approach and work towards long-term, holistic structures and strategies that will provide a framework for passion, productivity and excellence to grow.



Suzanne DiBiase (R), 5th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I am a lifelong resident of Milford who has a sincere desire to make a contribution to the overall quality of life in our community. Serving on the Board of Education is my way of doing that. I have taken my service these past two terms seriously, listening to the people of the 5th District and giving voice to them. It has been my honor to do so and I hope that the good people in my district give me the opportunity to continue to serve.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
I believe that my job as a member of the Board of Education is to represent those who put their trust in electing me to represent them. I keep that at the forefront of the votes that I make and when working with the board to set policy and direction for the district, approving the annual operational budget, and advocating for parents who have concerns. We must always keep in mind the desires of the community and balance those desires with the requirements of the state and federal government.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
The Board of Education does not “administer” the budget, they vote on and determine the budget and then turn it over to the Administration to “administer”. Our responsibility is setting the annual budget and prioritizing the dollars of that budget. As a fiscally responsible person, I believe the

budget should be a balance between the needs of the system and concerns of the taxpayers. I do that everyday in my personal life and at work for a local manufacturer. Understanding that balance is important and sometimes just plain common sense works well.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
UNFUNDED mandates, those laws that are passed by the state, which require us to pay for something they mandate that we must do. It could be a program or a service. The money that our taxpayers provide to cover these unfunded mandates is huge. I think about the things we could accomplish at the local level if our hands and pocketbooks weren't tied with these unfunded mandates.



Ray Kirmaier (R), 5th District

1) Why do you want to be on the Board of Education?
I want to give back to my community and providing a quality education that prepares our students for life is important to me. When I speak to local employers they ask why isn't there more conversation around providing skills that will make our students employable, not every student chooses college. But every student who graduates should be prepared to make that choice—college, work, or otherwise. I want to be part of setting policies that will give those choices to our kids.

2) Please give a brief synopsis of what you believe the job entails.
While many of the jobs of members of the Milford Board of Education are defined through state statues and our City charter, I believe that as a member of the Board of Education I should represent the needs of those who elected me. I need to be their voice on the local level as well as at the state and federal level on education matters. I believe the job should require one to listen and respond to the educational needs and expectations of our community. And, I think it is imperative that members work in collaboration with City and education staff constantly improving the system to the benefit of our students, staff, and community.

3) What qualifies you to administer an $89 million budget?
Oversee would be a more appropriate qualification as the Administration and staff administer the budget that the elected board sets. It is important for board members to understand the budgetary process, especially since it is the driver for implementing policies also set by the board of education. I have years of experience working in the development and execution of

budgets for private industry. What is important is finding symmetry between spending and need.

4) What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the Milford school system and how would you work to meet and help overcome it?
Milfords' educational concerns begin with the promise to educate ALL. This is a challenge when the current structure places unnecessary demands on the family. Our K-2 and 3-5 configurations have not worked. And, add to that the implementation of yet another mandate (Common Core) and we again are placing pressures on our classroom teachers, and more importantly our students. We need a system that is dedicated to early identification/intervention of those with learning deficiencies and the ability to supply the necessary help to assure success, the capacity to provide professional learning for staff that enhances the classroom, the desire to offer challenging coursework for those who excel, the necessity to upgrade buildings to ensure they are conducive to teaching/learning, the expectation of extra-curricular activities. Let's do what is right for our kids, let's move back to a K-5 system and fight obstacles that get in the way of letting teachers teach!

Thank You!!

Milford is indeed a city filled with ardent volunteers, interested community members, and gracious guests.

We would like to send our heartfelt thanks to the following individuals and groups for going "above and beyond." Your efforts continue to help us make sure this event takes place each and every election year.

Special thanks to **Brian Smith** – our friend, neighbor, and local celebrity – for serving as our guest moderator this evening.

Thank you to the **Milford Government Access Television** (MGAT), Channel 78 – and **The Milford Mirror** -- for helping us share this information with everyone in Milford.

Thank you to **Richard Smith** and **Paul Beckwith** for helping us coordinate the candidates' answers for our Forum Booklet.

Thank you to **Patrick Bradbury, Director of Facilities/MPS** for his willingness to help us prepare for this program.

Thank you to **John Smith** and the **Jonathan Law High School Custodial Staff** for their generous hospitality and support in supplying a wonderful environment for our Forum.

And, last but not least, we thank **YOU** – for sharing your evening with us and becoming a more informed and responsible citizen.

Thank you and goodnight!

See you at the Polls
Nov. 5th!!

