

Hillsborough Education Association BOE Election Newsletter

November 2016

The Hillsborough Education Association proudly represents over 1,000 dedicated professionals employed in the Hillsborough Township Public Schools.

The information in this newsletter has been collected directly from each candidate's questionnaire. All candidates were given the opportunity to participate. This information can be shared with members of the New Jersey Education Association, as well as the public. **This newsletter by no means serves as an endorsement of any candidate and should be used solely to educate voters on the positions of all candidates.**



**General Candidate
Information**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

How long have you been a resident of Hillsborough?

I am a 14-year Hillsborough resident.

Do you have children/grandchildren who attend Hillsborough Township Public Schools? If so, which schools?

I have 3 children and they attend HMS (8th grade), ARIS (5th grade) and WRS (2nd grade).

**Why are you
seeking a position
on the Board?**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

I’m running for the school board because I want to improve communication, have more transparency in decision-making and engage the public in the conversation of its priorities.

**What do you see as
the top three
education issues
our Board must
address?**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

Overall, the district does an excellent job academically. Three areas that could use additional focus are (1) student mental health, (2) infrastructure and (3) communication.

The school system is one of the community’s largest support networks. Mental wellness is critical for a student’s overall success and the school board should prioritize resources for students dealing with anxiety, depression and drug / alcohol abuse, etc. In addition, I think the district should have increased partnership with township and county support organizations.

Two ideas I’ve proposed investigating – delayed school start times and a balanced school year schedule – would improve mental and physical health. Starting the school day later would align the school’s daily schedule with a teenager’s natural sleep cycle. A balanced school year would give everyone more frequent breaks. I understand these ideas break with tradition, but I think they are worth exploring because of the positive results in communities that have tried them.

Balanced year schooling would require infrastructure improvement, specifically in air conditioning. Several years ago, the school HSAs were interested in fundraising with the goal of installing air conditioning in their schools. From what I heard, they were turned down because the facilities department said the buildings could not support the additional electrical load. If elected, I’d revisit that proposal with the goal of a definitive report on cost and upgrade requirements.

That leads me to communication – our leaders have a lot of knowledge, but in order for the public to feel engaged, our leaders need to share that knowledge. If the HSA funding for air conditioning was looked at and rejected as not workable, why not share that in a memo? That way, we don’t revisit the topic every few years or rely on hearsay.

Budgeting

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

Do you believe that our school district should budget to cap?

If elected, one of the first things I plan to do is a line-by-line detailed financial budget review of the district’s income and expenses. The school district is constrained by law to a 2% increase, and I don’t understand why the board doesn’t use the full 2% to fund programs and initiatives.

What should the board do to gain community support for our schools, and for the school budget?

At a recent school board candidate briefing, the speaker talked about the school board as the community’s representative and that it is the board’s responsibility to reach out to the public. This resonates with me and is part of the reason I am running for school board.

The school board should make it easier for the public to get involved and learn about the issues. It’s not always practical for parents to attend evening school board meetings. I always find “Coffee with the Superintendent” informative – perhaps the school board could arrange something similar. I understand though the board may be constrained in its ability to engage outside the formal channels. If elected, one of my priorities is improved communication with all stakeholders.

Would you ever consider subcontracting services? If so, what areas?

One of the district’s core competencies is to educate students, so I am not against the idea of subcontracting services that are not in the district’s core competency. However, without analyzing the budget, I’m not convinced the district would achieve long-term benefits from subcontracting services.

Negotiations

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

What is your perception of the negotiations process that presently exists? Is there anything you would change?

I don't understand why contract negotiations take so long. Prior to starting negotiations, it would be helpful for the BOE and HEA to communicate with the public the top issues and their budget impact.

I understand the BOE's position that it represents the community and therefore must vigorously negotiate the contract. However, I disagree that the BOE must achieve the lowest possible tax increase. As a community, we should remember this is a contract with people who spend most of the waking day with our children. Teachers and staff do an amazing job and they deserve a fair contract.

Not being on the negotiations committee, I may be way off target in my criticism. But that circles back to my point about increased communications so that the general public understands the issues.

What are your views on completing contract negotiations before the contract expires?

In theory, I believe a new contract should be signed before the current contract expires. What changed between the first and last negotiating sessions? Again, not being on the negotiations committee, my simplistic view says both sides should skip all the in-between.

**Educational
Quality**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

With an eye to maintaining top-quality education and innovative programs, what do you think is a reasonable class size?

Intuitively, small class size seems like a good idea. However, similar to full day kindergarten, my preliminary research shows mixed evidence and that the largest impact is for lower income families. Also, smaller class size seems to be more important in the lower grades (kindergarten through 3rd grade). The question is what’s the most effective use of our limited educational dollars? For example, does class-size reduction generate as much return as raising teacher salaries or offering additional teacher professional development opportunities?

What steps do you think should be taken to maintain a reasonable class size?

I don’t know. We’ve already separated our 5th and 6th grades into the intermediate school and our 7th and 8th grades into the middle school. This arrangement offers more flexibility in averaging out class sizes whereas the six neighborhood elementary schools have less flexibility. I like the K-4 set up and I am less interested in the idea of a K-2nd and 3rd and 4th grade specific school.

The research I looked at indicates that the largest benefit comes from reducing a class size of 22 to approximately 15 and it’s not clear the community would support such a small class size. There is a much smaller benefit by reducing class size by only 1 or 2 students.

**Responsibilities of
the Board**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

When establishing Superintendent Merit Goals, do you believe that areas such as facility deficiencies, safety issues and/or staff morale should be considered?

I don't understand the purpose of the superintendent's merit goals and associated bonuses. The merit goals seem to reward things that should already be part of the superintendent's job description. I think this is why the public was so angry when the bonus was reported.

I'm sure there is a reason for the superintendent's merit goals and bonus. Perhaps it's because the board believes the superintendent should earn more than his administrative staff. State law caps the superintendent's salary at \$177,500 and the next 2 highest paid administrators earn only \$2,000 and \$3,000 less than him.

Overall, I think the superintendent is doing a good job and I agree with the board that we should work to retain him. He has a lot of good ideas. I think any merit goals and bonuses should be related to areas where his leadership directly effects change.

All board motions are prefaced by the words: “On the recommendation of the superintendent,” if elected, will you accept the recommendation of the superintendent without question? If not, what sources of information would you consider when making board decisions?

I think the superintendent's recommendations are just the starting point. Before making my decision, I would do my own research from resources such as the New Jersey School Board Association and independent education researchers.

I would also get feedback from stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and community members, and circle back to the administration with questions. Even if these questions are asked in private, I think it's important for all board members to share their thinking with the public prior to the public vote.

**Concluding
Statement**

Debashis “Dev” Dutta

No response

Gregory Gillette

No response

Thomas Kinst

No response

Jean Trujillo

I think the district’s greatest strength is its people. If elected, I will work to build and maintain good relationships among all stakeholders. I have been an active volunteer in the schools since my youngest child started kindergarten. I’ve chaired numerous HSA fundraising committees, including the ARIS teachers vs. Harlem Wizards game in January 2015. I’m an engineer by training and the most important thing I learned in school was to recognize when “I don’t know.” I think that’s why I ask so many questions and try to learn from the answers. It’s also part of the reason I want to represent the Hillsborough community on the school board – I think a lot of us have questions we’d like answered.

Hillsborough Education Association

417 Route 206
Suite 204
Hillsborough, NJ 08844