

November 2017

Franklin Township Education Association BOE Election Newsletter

The Franklin Township Education Association proudly represents over 900 dedicated professionals employed in the Franklin 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.



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

Nishita Desai

“Since the age of 21, I have been an active educator in varying capacities in New Jersey. While a student at Rutgers University, I was responsible for educating numerous students in Biology Learning Center Lab. Then at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey CINJ/ UMDNJ (now also a part Rutgers), I taught students cancer research techniques. Now at Rutgers Preparatory School, I teach Chemistry and Biology, as well as more specialized topics such as Human Diseases and Cancer Biology. I have been living in Somerset with my husband and children for the past 17 years. My son was enrolled in both public and private schools; after graduating from Georgetown University in Washington DC, he now lives and works as a strategy consultant in NY. My daughter has attended private, charter and public schools; she is currently a student at Franklin Middle School. Due to this exposure across different educational systems and levels, I now have unique insight into many of the defining aspects of our current educational systems. My motivating belief is that every child in our district should have the opportunity to succeed in a safe, bully-free environment, with access to small class sizes and curricula that meet the needs of all students and help them flourish. Success for all students stems from three factors: first, schools must be accountable to students and parents through clear communication; second, curricula must be strong enough to make students college-ready, regardless of their starting position; third, schools must develop curricula that teach students to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems. Our township schools, under the leadership of Dr. Ravally and the current Board have already rolled out major improvements for better communication, including Twitter and Facebook initiatives. In order to understand the needs of Franklin Park residents, Mike Smith, Ed Potosnak (incumbent) and I have been meeting with them to discuss the issues, pain points, and challenges that Franklin schools face. I plan to work with current Board members to resolve some of these macro issues in addition to working on school and district goals, along with the five-year goals already set by the current board.”

Andre Fryson

No response

Ed Potosnak

“It has been a pleasure to work with the FTEA over the years as a member of the board and as President. As you know, I have worked extremely hard to get the Board working together and strategic about our mission. I am honored and proud of this work and the many accomplishments we have had together. I am running for reelection to continue the progress, building on the foundation we have fortified and work together to take Franklin Public Schools to the next level. The past few years have shown how much is possible when we commit to progress, respect, and honesty. That’s why I have chosen Nishita Desai and Mike Smith to run together with, they share these commitments”

Michelle Shelton

No response

Michael Smith

“Having two children in the District Schools for the last 10 years (FHS and FMS now), it is quite apparent that the wonderful Franklin community has a lot to offer. My background as a research scientist and my diverse education (parochial elementary, public high, BS, MS, PhD, as well as a furniture making apprenticeship) gives me a unique lens through which to view issues facing our schools and students. I would like to help continue the forward momentum of the district and help ensure that the district schools can be the best that they can in times of reduced funding.”

Patricia Stanley

“I am seeking re-election to this position because I am concerned about the attitude of educators toward all students. That statement requires an explanation. Franklin Township does well by its college bound students offering many AP courses, counseling, etc. However, in discussions with recent FHS graduates, I am hearing that if you're not college bound, there is almost a bias against you. This upsets me. College is not for everybody and we should be making education in the trades available in the high school through work study. Yes we do have vocational high schools but they can't accommodate everyone. And all students should know the basics of running a household, handling a bank account and credit cards. Even if you are going to be a plumber, why can't you learn to read for pleasure or listen to classical music? Everybody needs a good education. The students should be taught how to learn so that they continue to learn for the rest of their lives.”

What are the top three issues the BOE must address?

Nishita Desai

“The biggest stressor to the Franklin Township school system is the diversion of funding from our public schools to newly formed charter schools. Of course I believe we should all have choices, but all choices in a consideration set must face the same level of scrutiny. However, charter schools are publicly funded but privately owned; many are for-profit and are not subject to the same transparency and accountability requirements as public schools. We do not have data on how they spend their funding and the data we do have shows that charters lack the socioeconomic diversity of public schools. Such a discrepancy (by design) between samples in a medical or scientific journal would be considered a grievous flaw and would likely result in the author getting discredited. For example, during the 2014-2015 school year, CJCP's enrollment of students with disabilities was 7% compared to 16% at Franklin Township Public Schools (FTPS). Their enrollment for English Language Learners and Hispanic students is significantly lower than the Township schools, as well. FTPS have 45% free and reduced lunches while the charters have less than 10%. These discrepancies at charters serve only to divide our township's residents on socioeconomic lines. Currently, FTPS have close to 8,000 students enrolled. Charter schools have only a small fraction of the student population but they take a large chunk of our public school funding. If all the charter school expansions are approved, they will cost Franklin Township taxpayers an estimated \$20 million. This money will be diverted from our public schools and our children's education toward opaque for-profit

institutions. I plan to work with the Board of Education to prevent any further expansion of the charters and taking away precious resources from FTPS."

Andre Fryson

No response

Ed Potosnak

- 1 *"Continuing to increase academic performance by supporting our teachers, especially as we expand the one to one laptop initiative."*
- 2 *"Expanding our Gifted and Talented and Career and Technical Programs."*
- 3 *"Completing the Referendum projects on time, opening Claremont Road School, and reconfiguring the District."*

Michelle Shelton

No response

Michael Smith

- a.) *"We must help the district continue to establish appropriate leadership in all of our schools for the long term. Once established we will need to support the school community and students to continue real progress."*
- b.) *"Improve communication with the public to ensure that true representation of the great parts about the schools is disseminated. This has be accomplished with measurable goals."*
- c.) *"Ensure that our students learn not only the fundamentals but can continue to have the great experiences that allow them to learn the intangibles in the extracurricular programs and elective classes as funding appears to decrease."*

Patricia Stanley

"1/ Costs- I believe that teachers in the classroom deserve higher salaries and levels of supervision and 'coaching' can be reduced. I understand being an administrator is a demanding job but so is being in the classroom where the rubber meets the road, the day-in, day-out, one-on-one, one-on-20 relationship the teacher has with their students. Is everyone going to wind up with a six figure salary? I don't think so, but there are many administrators who are in that bracket and that is a questionable situation, one that exists throughout NJ. Over time teachers who have become administrators have arrived at salary expectations that cannot continue."

"2/ Discipline in the classroom and supporting teachers in this area.

Disruptions in the classroom take up everyone's time. They take away valuable teaching/learning time that cannot be recovered. A chronically disruptive student must be dealt with as soon as possible in as compassionate a manner as possible to help that kid not necessarily to punish. I learned this on the job in Union City."

"3/ Balancing the use of computing in the curriculum. Are computers helping or hindering or both? I hear two takes from teachers: they take time to set up; are unreliable. Some think they're great. As a professional database programmer for 30 years, I know their limitations and I believe sometimes they should be put aside and the concepts taught in a tried and true fashion. I am not dazzled by computers, social media and tweeting. We should be teaching them how to think not what to think and how to use the latest software program."

"And don't get me started about too much testing."

What is the role of charter schools in Franklin Township?

Nishita Desai

"The people of Franklin Township have wanted a choice in education, whether Parochial, Private, Charter or Public, evidenced by the number and type of schools that have arisen in our township. Charter schools offer that choice, but must be held to the same standards that any other taxpayer-funded school would be."

Andre Fryson

No response

Ed Potosnak

"There is no role for charter schools in Franklin Township. Unfortunately, we have two already open and approved to expand and another conditionally approved to open in September of 2018— we don't need any of them. The charter schools are taking away precious resources from Franklin Township Public Schools. Charters waste taxpayer money with duplication of administrative costs and facilities costs; which means less money going to actual education. Charter schools employees are less experienced teachers who come at a lower cost but also lack critical experiences to ensure education achievement in three students. That's why Franklin Township Public School students get college credit 200% more often on the AP Exams— we have experienced teachers educating our students. Charter school students cost more per seat than our traditional, efficiently run, schools— when you take the tuition and add bussing it is more expensive to educate a child at a charter school. Lastly, and most importantly, Charter Schools are ethnically isolated with very few English language learners or special education students. Franklin is a great town because it has amazing diversity— but at the Charters they don't. They just don't educate the same diverse student body."

Michelle Shelton

No response

Michael Smith

"The role should be minimal. Sure there are places where schools are broken, but Franklin Township is not one of them. There is a baseline level of citizens looking for

choice, but by making the district schools so appealing, parents will want to have their children in the district schools.”

Patricia Stanley

“I think we all know why Charter Schools arose in the first place. It was the abject failure of public schools in the cities where parents threw up their hands in despair. They then took it upon themselves to forge an alternative. To demonize these schools and the parents who choose to send their children there now, seems so ironic. Charter schools in Franklin will continue to play a role because the parents/taxpayers want them to play a role. In the none-charter, 'regular' schools, teachers and administration should express higher expectations of students in terms of discipline not lower. My understanding is that the discipline situation is why Franklin's reputation suffers. Strong leadership is required to hold kids to higher expectations. Consider this: Over 10 years, we are going to spend 1 million dollars to put safety officers on bus routes to cut down on state reportable disciplinary incidents. I would rather allot that money to classroom teacher salaries.”

Would you ever consider subcontracting services?

Nishita Desai

“Virtually all school systems historically have and will continue to use private vendors or contracting services to some degree. This is not a simple question, though it may seem so. In order to decide on subcontracting services, we would need to perform a cost-benefit analysis. Those in charge of such decisions must evaluate private vendors to forecast quality, impact on the school community, administrative cost, social cost, loss of control, and restricted flexibility before contracting out any service.”

Andre Fryson

No response

Ed Potosnak

“I remain opposed to subcontracting teachers and paraprofessionals, custodians, cafeteria and maintenance personnel. We are extremely lucky to run our own food services, when other districts have subcontracted this out at a greater cost, we have been able to keep this in house, which is my preference.”

Michelle Shelton

No response

Michael Smith

“Having an educational workforce that is invested in the community can only lead to higher employee satisfaction and in turn, a better environment for our kids. Having workers who are not treated as part of our community is not something that I would like to support.”

Patricia Stanley

“Unfortunately, in these times, any and all paths toward reducing costs must be analyzed. Perhaps maintenance and security services could be outsourced. As a victim of out-sourcing myself by a Fortune 50 corporation, I know all too well how painful these actions are on employees. Shifting the overhead costs of employees to a subcontracting firm supplying any kind of service can save money. However, whatever action is taken has to be analyzed for its impact on the ultimate product of the Franklin School System. Will it be the best action to take for the kids' welfare? I do have doubts about outsourcing substitute teachers. I was a substitute teacher myself many years ago for Union City, NJ. I think teachers are professionals and should be treated as such. I see the 'administrative' overhead and costs associated but I also see substitutes as a possible 'feeder' system. You may hire from the substitute pool that you have carefully nurtured as time goes on. You hire a person you have seen in action.”