

Raritan Township Democratic Club

Questions for 2019 Flemington-Raritan Board of Education candidates

10/17/2019 – updated with responses from Ed Morgan

What do you consider the most important challenges facing our schools and how do you intend to address these challenges?

Robyn Fatooh - There are two pressing issues for the FRSD schools, the need to assess redistricting and ensuring the needs identified in the referendum are implemented. When elected, I will support the redistricting evaluation and work collaboratively to make decisions that have minimal disruption to students and staff. Regardless of the referendum passing or not, the critical structural improvements will need to be addressed. Without the referendum one passing, the board will need to explore sensitive issues like class size, reduction in staff, and program changes. I would like to explore solar roof options to see if it could offset any costs to the district.

Marianne Kenny – Security anxiety, special needs students, Fiscal responsibility

Ed Morgan - Security, fiscal responsibility, and updating and maintaining the schools.

Johanna S. Ruberto - As a resident of the Flemington Raritan Regional School District, I consider the greatest challenge to be the utilization/availability of resources to offer every child a safe, highly effective, and individualized educational experience.

As a potential member of the Board of Education it is my belief that addressing District challenges requires a collaborative process between and among the Board members themselves and the school administrators. This includes working with other Board members to review and potentially revise school policies and procedures to ensure that the students are provided a safe environment so that they can take advantage of the education they are receiving. I would support continued professional development for the administration, faculty, and staff so that the professionals in our District continue to maintain and deliver highly effective academic experiences within a nurturing school environment. I would also encourage other members to maintain not only their current level of knowledge, but also to continue to grow that knowledge so that the Board may offer observations that are relevant, valid, and in line with current understandings of educational development.

Murty Varanasi - Our schools need to be competitive and the children in the school system should get the highest quality education.

Challenges are primarily to obtain appropriate funding to meet the safety, security and necessary upgrades to the heating, air conditioning, roofing to provide the best learning environment to the students. Failure to do that will put our schools and children at a competitive disadvantage. In addition, delaying the necessary upgrades if we don't get the referendum approved will cost the tax payers and schools down the road more and may inconvenience if unforeseen circumstances arise to the safety of the facilities.

Christopher Walker –

- Security for our students and staff.
- Hiring the finest staff that fits our culture and district vision to serve our students.
- Facilities and their use.
- Future redistricting

I will continue to serve on facility and security committee to better enhance our school security measures with the hopeful addition of security guards at each school entrance. These staff members could relieve our office secretaries from the responsibilities of monitoring and signing in visitors. In addition, these same possible new staff members could assist SLEO's and oversee security cameras.

I will continue to ask for updates on student enrollments for each school along with each buildings capacity for students.

I will continue to provide oversight for the positions of business administrator and facilities- grounds manager. Future revisions to both job descriptions could be forthcoming for full board to consider.

Finally, I will continue to provide oversight and vote for the highest quality of staff members who will provide services to our children.

What personal and professional experiences have prepared you for addressing these challenges?

Robyn Fatooh - As a resident of Raritan Township for 11 years, our eldest recently entered Central after a successful experience through FRSD with our youngest now at Robert Hunter. As a parent I can appreciate the various perspectives raised related to both redistricting and referendum needs. For 20 years I've been given increased responsibilities in my company based on my ability to learn and listen before making major decisions. I've built strong leadership skills based on influence and inclusive collaboration. Fundamental to my success has been achieving results within set budgeting and staff resources. I serve in multiple community service capacities and continue to be sought out for my thoughtful and practical approaches. I'm respected as someone that gets involved to bring resolution and provide strategic advice. When elected I will bring my perspective as a parent and expertise in business to govern as a unified Board of Education to achieve our Mission in FRSD.

Marianne Kenny – I have had the great privilege to support the FRSD school community in a variety of positions over the past 7 years, including my current 6 year role as Chair of the Policy Committee. This Committee is critical to the Governance of the District and creation of policy is one of the sole responsibilities of the School Board. All functioning is under Policy in some manner. The policy that I am most proud of is Policy 7446 School Security Program. Chris Walker and I worked very diligently so that this policy was accurate for FRSD and presented to the community and Board for approval. It was started with our interim superintendent, Johanna Roberto, and finally finalized with our current superintendent who we worked to identify and hire, Kari McGann. I recently was included in the Special Education committee, which is a world that I believe the Board can help to optimize within our District. Attending special needs parent groups, and learning the state laws has been a very valuable resource for me so that I can be as affective on this committee as possible. I hope to continue to support our children and school community as a seasoned and active participant of FRSD BOE. I want to meet the high expectations of our families and community and support our mission of “every student, every day, every opportunity”. I have sound judgment, an even temper, a willingness to collaborate, and a sincere interest in public education in our community. My son is in 7th grade in the district and my husband is a music teacher at Hunterdon Central Regional School District. I love this community. My son has had teachers that care and communicate and deserve their voice heard. The level of professionalism and human warmth and caring our teachers, principals, nurses, special services, aids, front desk workers, and facilities staff is amazing. Through all of my Board of Education experiences, I have witnessed the challenges that the district has faced in the past and the remarkable way our community has come together and met those challenges to keep our children’s wellbeing first. This is due to the talented caring teachers, dedicated parents and entire school staff who value a cutting edge core academic curriculum in addition to music, arts, athletics, and other extracurricular activities that support the educational development and inner growth of our children as a whole person. I will work hard to ensure that this district’s dedication continues for the benefit of all our students. I believe that each member brings their view and perspective to the Board. This mix of different histories and values enables the Board to find the best oversight possible. I believe that my history as being a pharmacist and have been involved in many team and medication risk mitigation work within big global pharma companies and working with the FDA on the first opioid risk evaluation and mitigation plan, make me a valuable part of the board. I know process/policy/compliance. I know teams. I know how to work with various varying opinions. I

care about our district deeply and am a very active member of the current Board. We need varying perspectives and histories in order to arrive at the best collective truth

I'm campaigning for the 3 year seat with Christopher Walker and Ed Morgan (1year seat). We decided to campaign together since we feel that working as a team and discussing and coming to a joint conclusion is the best way to achieve a common goal. People on any team, especially when the welfare of children are a nonnegotiable factor, need to work together. Egos aside, personal agendas put aside, and becoming a bigger reason than just your point of view is what a successful Board looks like.

There is no greater trust and responsibility that can be given to an individual than to be entrusted with a child. If I am re-elected, I will continue to work with Ms McGann and my Board teammates to uphold that trust and responsibility to provide the best possible educational experience for every student every day.

Ed Morgan - I have lived in the school district for my whole life and I went through the schools. I also have 2 children currently growing up in the district and I enjoy taking an active role in their development. Currently I am employed at The Home Depot. In my role with The Home Depot I oversee the operation of a district. We manage several different projects and updates to the 9 stores that I am part of. We manage the budget that the stores have for updates and organize the teams that will execute the projects.

My commitment would be to the students and staff of our schools and ensure that the communities needs are address efficiently and responsibly. I am always looking for ways to say yes and make sure the right thing is being done. No matter what is happen around me I make sure to keep a cool and level head. There are no problems only solutions waiting to happen. I am looking forward to the challenge that will come with being a member of the board of education.

Currently I am campaigning with Christopher Walker and Marianne Kenny who are both running for a 3-year seat. We have decided to campaign together since we feel working as team and having open discussions is the best wat to achieve a common goal. The members of the board of Ed need to work together especially when the welfare of the children is a factor. A cohesive board that has open dialog is one that will succeed. Board members need to be willing to put their emotions aside for the greater good.

If elected I will work hand and hand with my fellow board members and Superintendent McGann to provide the best education for every student in the district along with a sound development plan for the staff.

Johanna S. Ruberto - Flemington Raritan has been my family's home since 1987. The Flemington Raritan School district provided both of my daughters with an academic experience in the alignment with the values of our home. I have witnessed my children excel at the schools in this district both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Throughout, my husband and I volunteered our time because we believed, and still do believe, that an important part of any child's educational experience is also fostering a community where the children and their families support each other and the school. As parents we were able to depend on school administration to be forthright and open about the challenges faced by the school and any issues regarding the education of our children. This open and honest communication with the schools and community with other families was important to us in having our children complete their education in Flemington-Raritan.

Professionally, I have been an educator for over 40 years. I have witnessed the development of the profession from every level. When I taught I strove to stay abreast of current trends in education. As a principal I became keenly aware of the dynamics at play between advocating for the students, teachers, and administrative staff so that whatever school I was at provided a comfortable environment for the students. I learned from my

experience as a superintendent the high expectations that community members placed on their school districts and how to best manage community concerns with Board of Education policies. I place a high value on public education and respect its role in the development of each child. If I did not believe in what our schools provide to our community I would not have spent my career advocating for and trying to ensure that the highest educational standards were met. I embrace the opportunity to serve my community.

Murty Varanasi - I was educated in India by attending one of the poorest schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh. However, due to my continued hard work and my parents support, I have achieved #1 ranking both at my high school and under graduate programs. I have continued my education further and completed my Ph.D. in Chemistry at one of the premier schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Even after achieving the highest degree (Ph.D.), I have continued post-doctoral training at U.Va, Charlottesville, VA; U.T, Austin, TX and UPenn, Philadelphia, PA. I have worked in several pharmaceutical companies and recently retired after 21 years of service at Bayer Health Care. I have participated and volunteered in various educational programs (example, Making Science Make Sense) and presided over judging science fair at Chester Science Fair several years. I am proud that both my children benefited through the excellent education at Flemington-Raritan School District and Hunterdon High School. My daughter Swathi Varanasi was in the first graduating class at JP Case Middle School (2006) and was the first one to perform Indian Classical Dance Recital as a solo performer for three hours at the JP Case Middle School Auditorium (2007). After graduating from Hunterdon High, she has continued further education (BA from Carleton College, MN, 2014) and Pharm. D. (Medical University of South Carolina, 2019) and continuing a residency program in Los Angeles (CA). My son (Sarat Varanasi) attended Robert Hunter, Raritan Flemington Middle School, JP Case and graduated from Hunterdon High (2012) and Rutgers University (2016) and currently working for CBS as a Senior Financial Analyst. I am proud of my children, however, prouder to be part of Raritan Flemington School system. Now, it is my turn to work in the school board and working closely with the superintendent and the school board to work on projects for the betterment of our school system so that our schools and children stay competitive. I live in Flemington since 2003 and I am active in my Indian community. If elected to the school board, I will work closely with Indian families and our community. I strongly believe that committed parents and a close community will bring greater benefit to our schools and children. Look forward for an opportunity to be part of the school board.

Christopher Walker –

- 1) I have 3 decades of being a teacher and coach. I currently serve our community as a teacher at Hunterdon Central
- 2) I serve and coach various youth sports team in town.
- 3) I am just finishing serving a 3 year term as a board member
- 4) I was nominated by my fellow board members to be board president this past January

Do you support or oppose the referendum questions (<https://www.frsd.k12.nj.us/Page/5123>, Proposal 1 and Proposal 2) the school board has placed on this year's ballot? Do you agree with putting bonding questions out for referendum? Please explain your positions.

Robyn Fatooh - I think it's important for individual voters to make their own decisions so I will not push my personal opinion. I ask that everyone do their own research on why these projects have been identified for funding, what the investment provides for, and how the referendum will impact their personal property taxes. Informed voters that make their own independent decisions ensures our democracy and purpose of a referendum.

Marianne Kenny – I appreciate this question. It's a very large topic with a huge impact and raises lots of questions as to what and how it is now on the ballot. Since I am on the Board of Ed right now, and the vote passed to move the questions to ballot, this question is difficult for me to say how I will vote as an individual since I am also a Board Member. As a Board Member I respect the democratic philosophy of majority rules and as a Board Member, I must agree with the decision to move this item to approval for community review and vote. I cannot undermine that decision by saying I was pro or con any item that has majority vote. Personally, I am concerned and I feel that if these proposals pass, then we will need to be extremely diligent with this large sum of money. As a taxpayer I feel concerned as to how we are in this position in the first place. I am a big believer in household budgets that include saving for repairs (ask my husband). I am not saying or placing blame on anyone, just my point of view. If it passes, it is such a large amount of money that any sane board (or household for that matter) needs to engage fully with the financial planning for the health and support of the District. We cannot be in the situation again. Oversight of finances is a basic fundamental for the Board of Ed (see quote below from NJSBA) and will be my focus. I have managed large budgets in my 28 years in business (pharmaceuticals) and will make certain within the Board's guardrails, that we protect this money, if we receive it from our community's generosity.

“You and your fellow board members must be the visionaries, the goal-setters, the ones who express the community's aspirations. At the same time, you must also be pragmatists, responsible for ensuring that the community's dollars are spent effectively. In short, you are responsible for providing a quality education — the constitutionally mandated “thorough and efficient” system of education — at a price the community can afford.” NJSBA – Fundamentals of School Board Members

Ed Morgan - I am concerned with how we let the schools get the way they did in the first place. I believe that we need something to fix the aging schools. If passed and if I am elected, I will work to make sure that the funds are used responsibly. As I am running for the first time, I was not part of the decision to pass the referendum. Again, I see the need for something to be done to fix the issues in the schools and I trust that the board looked at all their options before moving forward with the referendum. As a parent to two children in the schools their safety and well being is top of mind for me.

Johanna S. Ruberto - Parents should not be concerned that their child might be going to a school where the air conditioning might break or the roof is faulty. Parents should only need to focus on the educational value the school is providing their child and not carry around these ancillary anxieties. I think the best way to show the

community that you are fully focused on the students is to be transparent when approaching projects that require funding at this level and ask for their support through these referendums.

Murty Varanasi - I strongly support the Proposal 1 and 2. As a tax payer, it makes good sense to invest in our schools so that the children in Flemington Raritan schools get the top-notch education. It is our humble duty to support the referendum proposals. In addition, it is smart to bring in the necessary upgrades now to save a lot down the road.

Christopher Walker - I echo the sentiments of my running mate-- Marianne Kenny; since “we” are both on the Board of Ed right now, and the vote passed to move the questions to ballot, this question is also difficult for me to say how I will vote as an individual since I am also a Board Member. I must also agree with the full board decision to move this item to approval for community review and vote. I cannot undermine that decision by saying I was pro or con any item that has majority vote.

If referendum is passed I will make every effort possible for this school district not be in in this same financial situation that we are in. Over 15 years our capital reserve should have been built up to be able to offset some of these facilities up grades and repairs. Our district cannot keep going out to our taxpayers with a referendum every 15-20 years.

In my 2nd term as a board member I will request to be on a 4th committee...Finance. All board members usually only serve on a maximum of 3 committees. On that committee and board I will advise that our superintendent add an additional resource to help with oversight of the 42 million dollar referendum, if passed by our community.

What, if anything, do you think the current school board is doing right?

Robyn Fatooh - The school board has done a wonderful job assimilating the new Superintendent, updating policies appropriately and living into the Mission of FRSD by putting a referendum to the public vote.

Marianne Kenny –

1. I feel we hired a very smart and resilient Superintendent. She is the national leader for STEM (which I would like to be changed to STEAM to include the arts, but one step at a time) and her talents for knowing the importance of communicating with our police departments is perfect.
2. I think by passing the security policy (which I am chair of the policy committee and have been for the past 5 years. Policy also being a fundamental of being a School Board Member) that enabled her to hire security guards, we are on the right path to take on big topics like security in our schools.
3. I feel our new Science program is amazing. Learning through doing not just rehashing vocabulary is key to liking science. I am a pharmacist and feel that in my experience learning things by rote is not exciting for kids.
4. I feel Mr. Bland’s ability to look at our schools data and share back during our public meetings what the raw data means in terms of which section of children are succeeding and which sections need help is critical. His metric knowledge is something we need to talk about more.
5. I feel that we are watching the high school closer – trying to share their bus schedules to save money. We are trying to match their holidays and professional development days so that we do not have extra bus runs.
6. I feel that my asking for training is listened to – especially recently around school board members social media postings that were in bad taste and reflected poorly in my opinion, on the district. I was granted a Board training on the topic. We need to be cognoscente of how we behave in public and hold harmony of the Board in highest regard. We are the voice of our students and that should be our focus.

Ed Morgan – I feel that the board made a great choice in Superintendent. In my conversations with her she as given me a scene of safety. I believe that she is always putting the children first. They seem to have and handle on safety and security. When visiting the schools, you can see they measure that have been taken to ensure that security. I like the fact that they are working with the high school to save money with the transportation, matching their holidays and development days to limit the extra bus runs.

Johanna S. Ruberto - The current members of the Flemington Raritan Board of Education are working diligently with positive intent. By observation, the current Board of Education has been transparent and responsive to the issues facing the district. The Board has moved way from personal agendas to collaborative problem solving.

Murty Varanasi - Definitely yes. My positive experience with children’s education through the school system is a testament to say that the school board is doing great and it is on the right track. Yes, we can do better if the community lend their helping hand and work closely with the schools to meet the challenges.

Christopher Walker – I feel we hired an excellent person and professional as Superintendent. She is the national leader for STEM and her talents for knowing the importance of communicating with staff and community is outstanding.

Passing the security policy (which I was chair of the Facility-Operations and Security committee—FOS). I still serve on that committee and it was my initiative along with Dr. Kenny to start the talks about looking into hiring SLEO personnel to better protect our students and staff. I then worked very closely with Dr. Kenny as policy chair to move this initiative through her committee and onto the full board for approval.

Passing the revised Facility use policy when I was chair of the Facility-Operations and Security committee—FOS. This revision and additions were a huge accomplishment for both my committee and Dr. Kenny's committee. Our policy revisions made our facilities more equitable and more available to our taxpayers. These changes to the policy most importantly tightened up district safety measures and provided safer use for our participants. I'm campaigning for the 3-year seat with my fellow incumbent board member, Marianne Kenny along with newcomer, Ed Morgan (1 year seat). The three of us decided to come together and set up "E3-4kids" campaign since we feel that working as a team and discussing important concerns are the best way to achieve a common goal. The three of us currently have multiple children in the district unlike some of the other candidates for these board seats. We feel if elected when can show others board members a new level of importance and value with regards to teamwork. The ultimate goal is for all for voices to be respected with a culture of appreciation.