

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Diane Roger Arroya**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

**Arroya Response**

*My qualifications as a candidate for school board trustee is this: I am a parent to three beautiful, intelligent girls who are in the Mount Vernon City School District, in turn I became the PTA President for Graham school and the Health and Wellness Committee Chair. In the past I have worked as an assistant teacher in a Head Start program. I am also completing my master's degree in Public Administration at Northcentral University. It is earning my degree where I see that Mount Vernon can benefit so much if we do proper research and strategic planning to improve not only our school system but our community.*

2. School Financing. How local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief (sentence or two) description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

**Arroya Response**

*Property tax is the primary source of funding for district schools. Everybody with property remits taxes to the local government, which uses the funds to run educational activities in schools. The NYS foundation aid donates funds on annual bases to schools in the state. Specifically, only public schools benefit from this aid which enables them to acquire teaching requirements. Every year, the national government, in its budget, sets funds that are distributed to students and institutions through competitive processes. The local law gives a leeway for schools to issue bonds to facilitate the purchase or construction of school assets like land or classrooms*

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?

**Arroya Response**

*School curriculum should include teaching information technology (IT) concepts because technology is incorporated into daily operations. Further, the students should be taught about mental issues and various approaches to maintaining stability. On the flip side, students should be taught everything,*

*including concepts they may consider useless. Exposure to a lot of ideas and concepts improves the students' cognitive development. The teaching of American and world history is comprehensive and essential as it enables students to understand past occurrences and their influence on modern societies.*

4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

Arroya Response

*Recruiting, developing, and retaining educators is inefficient and uncoordinated. This process requires coordination between various parties and stakeholders and its failure causes a shortage of qualified educators.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

Arroya Response

*To increase parent and community involvement by organizing school visits, having practical learning activities in the community, and incorporating technology in the learning activities. For instance, the school should set a digital framework that enables the virtual involvement of parents in the learning activities.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

Arroya Response

*Schools can put physical security measures like perimeter walls, doors, and windows to maintain security. The schools should have proper lighting, conduct regular security checks, and hire safety staff who oversee the processes.*

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Lorna Kirwan**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

Kirwan Response

*Lorna Kirwan is a long-standing Mount Vernon resident and a proud mother of a talented teenage daughter. She understands the importance of a good education. Lorna graduated from New York College of Technology with a Bachelor of Science Degree with concentration in Pre-Law. She earned a Master's Degree in Public Administration (MPA) from Pace University. She is an experienced banking financial professional specializing in audit, finance, compliance, policies, and procedures. Lorna will bring a wealth of experience, accomplishments, and community involvement to the School Board.*

2. School Financing. How local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief (sentence or two) description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

**Kirwan Response**

*Lorna's MPA degree provides her the educational background to understand the dynamics of building solid intergovernmental relationships among the Federal, State, County and City governments to produce funding and benefits to the School District.*

*Fiscal transparency and accountability are important. Foundation Aid was created to take school district wealth and student need into account to create an equitable distribution of state funding to schools. Additionally, the school district is qualified to receive funds from the NYS Foundation Aid legislation, as it was created to increase school aid to districts that are lacking sufficient financial resources. Mt Vernon is one of those districts. Entitlement grants provide funding from the State that is attributed to different factors such as a large percentage of student receiving free/reduced lunch. Mt Vernon School district falls under Title 1, so they are qualified for the Entitlement Grant, allowing additional funding for the district. The residents approved the 20/20 Bond, which allowed the district to fund large capital projects within the district. Lorna would also encourage the administration to apply for grants to offset some of the cost for different programs within the district. As a taxpayer, it is paramount to see our tax dollars spent the right way that benefits our children.*

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?

**Kirwan Response**

*Lorna believes that an integrated approach to nurturing a student's educational journey is essential to a successful child. Schools are the heart and soul of our community. She is a true believer that every child can reach their highest academic potential and career success once they have the support. As a school board trustee, Lorna would advocate for a high-level curriculum that will include high school students studying financial literacy before graduating. She would work with the administration to develop a social and emotional learning plan for the students. It is very vital for the district to have an educational framework for the elementary, middle, and high schools that are mandated to be followed by all educators. She would aim to help develop the first district-wide science fair among the schools that would expose them to compete at region and state levels. Lorna thinks it's essential to teach the students American, African American, and World History in school. History will instruct them about past cultures, ideologies, governments, and systems and how they evolved over the years. When students are taught history, it allows them not to repeat the past and to become global citizens.*

4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

**Kirwan Response**

*Recruiting and retaining teachers should be a priority for the school district as it will contribute to a positive school climate and student success. Lorna would work with the administration to hire long-time substitute teachers full-time and recruit qualified teachers within the community and beyond as a priority. She would work with the administration to partner with a university to develop a degree track for qualified Teacher Assistants to obtain a Bachelor's degree in teaching. However, the teachers will have to remain with the district for a minimum of three years. Additionally, Lorna will work with the administration to fill all vacant positions where funds were allocated from the budget. This will allow the school district to operate at its full capacity. She would work with the Board to implement a robust staff developing program for the teachers and staff. Teachers and staff should feel valued by the administration and the board so that they are motivated and excited to continue working in the school district.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

**Kirwan Response**

*As the past president of 6 years of the Mount Vernon PTA Council, Lorna has a proven track record and experience supporting education and advocating for parents, students, and the community. She believes that a school board must be responsive and receptive to parents, staff, and students by encouraging an open dialog. It is essential for the board to form a coalition with stakeholders from the community to address the parents, students, and schools' concerns, tackle the issues and collaborate on solutions to move forward. She would continue to encourage parents to join the PTA so their voices could be heard. Lorna would also work with the administration to develop a partnership with the school district and the city to host educational and fun events that would allow the entire family to participate.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

**Kirwan Response**

*Lorna deems school safety as a top priority for the school district currently. She will work with the board to implement bullying prevention training for the staff, parents, and students. Also, training for them to recognize indicators of potential violence. She would also encourage parents to monitor their student's social media accounts. She would work with the board to partner with the city to hire Resource Officers back into the schools and to have an emergency mass notification for the school community in place. She would encourage the district to hire mental health professionals to work with students that need services. Lorna would work with the administration to stimulate respectful, trusting, caring relationships and open lines of communication in the schools so that the students feel comfortable asking for help and report concerns about their peers. Fostering a positive school climate will help the students learn better and ease the parents' minds.*

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Marc Lenci**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

**Lenci Response**

*The current climate in the school system for students and employees is horrible. School security and the education of the city's children are at an all time low. I have a degree in criminology, but that is just a degree. I do not pass myself off as some form of security consultant, but my background in law enforcement positions me better than most to deal with the security issues that exist within our school system and our city. I worked as a police officer for over two decades, and a labor representative for almost as long. The latter allowed me access to members of law enforcement at all levels.*

*From my time in the Reserves, I am trained under DHS guidelines to review and evaluate the written safety and security plans of large commercial facilities and vessels. My responsibilities included the enforcement of the measures within previously approved plans. I will use my knowledge and contacts to help evaluate and recommend best safety and security practices for our school district. Some of the contacts I established over my career are within organized labor. I will coordinate with these leaders to assist the district in developing vocational training, which will help our students, who are not on the college path, in acquiring good jobs at a scale wage.*

2. School Financing. How local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief (sentence or two) description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

**Lenci Response**

*Property Taxes, NYS Foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds are all forms of funding for the school district.*

*Property Taxes are collected locally and pay for various programs, including our public education system.*

*NYS foundation aid is a form of state aid granted for the basic education of children in each district. Funds may be used at the district's discretion.*

*Federal entitlement grants are federal grants that have spending guidelines which must be abided by the awardee. These funds are to be used for specific items and programs within a district.*

*School bonds are issued to typically finance building projects or other capital projects.*

*One of the common denominators to all of these resources is that they are funded by taxpayers, one way or another. The residents of our city and state are already burdened with these expenses, therefore the greatest level of oversight is required to ensure these funds are spent appropriately, and that the city's students are educated at the least cost to the taxpayers.*

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?

Lenci Response

*The four R's are the most important part of our basic curriculum. Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Respect. Building on that, the school system needs to provide more education in basic life skills and responsibilities, such as the handling of finances and civics. In the course of dealing with many adults, who have come through our school system, it is apparent that certain basic life skills are not being impressed upon our citizenry.*

*One need only look at the actions of many of our city's elected officials to understand fiscal responsibility is not a part of the district's curriculum, nor taught in many of our homes.*

*At the high school level, we need more internship and apprenticeship opportunities, as well as business leadership mentoring.*

*At this point and time our school system ranks at the bottom of the list in the state. I do not think we as a community should be interested in reinventing the wheel. The school system needs to teach the basics. We need to prepare our children to be able to read and write and perform scholastically at a level higher than below the minimum.*

*World and American history are important subjects, however the discussion on the subject of history is dog whistle to those, who may look to upend the traditional curriculum. Creating an atmosphere of controversy over these or any subjects is not in the interest of our students at this time. The district appears to have a difficult enough time educating children in the absence of such controversies. I believe it is prudent to task the school system with educating children, without bringing other variables into the equation, including further controversy.*

4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

Lenci Response

*One of the most basic needs is security. In order to attract and retain the best school employees, the district must at a minimum provide a safe and hospitable work environment. Employees must be free of the obvious physical threats within our school environment, as well as the inappropriate psychological and financial threats from management, which appear to have been prolific within the MVSD. Once beyond these basic needs, a competitive compensation package, respect, and opportunities at personal growth are all any industry needs to attract and retain a good staff. It may sound basic, but it is a start.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

Lenci Response

*A lack of parental involvement in their child's education is not an issue across the entire district, but more in certain schools. I have spoken with numerous teachers and PTA representatives at length on this subject. Each explain that they have exhausted every idea and resource they had, trying to get parents involved. When those individuals, who have been in the trenches on an issue are at a loss, my thoughts may seem fanciful.*

*The best idea I have come up with comes from a program ran by the Northern Westchester Junior League. The JL invites parents to an event, to teach them about nutrition and meal preparation. At the end of the evening the parents go home with utensils and supplies to prepare a few meals. A program like this may allow for interaction and bonding between staff and parents, in schools that have historically shown low parental involvement.*

*It may sound basic, but it is a start.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

Lenci Response

*Security is a paramount concern in the world today and is a grave threat to the education of the city's children and retention of the district's employees.*

*First, and foremost, the district needs go back to having a separate facility for the district's at risk students, who require individualized attention. This will permit the city to provide these students with the education and guidance they need, while affording the district's other schools the opportunity to concentrate on education.*

*As far as a districtwide safety and security plan, the system needs to implement more traditional concepts, but dovetail these conventional measures with contemporary strategies.*

*Any plan should contain at a minimum:*

*1. School resources officers, under the direction of a police department supervisor, whose express purpose is school security. The officers must be fully trained and capable of a responding quickly to threats, including violence and school shootings.*

2. *Modern metal detectors in our most at risk schools. These detectors must be capable of detecting a diverse number of concealed threats.*
3. *A confidential call in line for concerned students and teachers to report potential threats.*
4. *Contracting with a social media monitoring service, to keep ahead of potential issues and threats that are posted.*

*Should the district choose to continue to outsource the management of their security program, the private company should incorporate all of the above into their operations, as well as communicate and interact regularly with the district's employees, the city's police department, and the police departments from adjacent communities.*

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Warren Mitchell**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

Mitchell Response

*I have my degree in business and the last 20 years of my career has been strictly Finance in the marketing PR, broadcasting and communications sector. I have 4 children in the district and years of involvement.*

2. School Financing. How local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief (sentence or two) description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

Mitchell Response

*The beginning is the taxpayer. They are the most important key factor in school financing. Like any other precious resource, it is to be protected, and be fluent in how its contributions are utilized. There is a huge disconnect in how the taxpayers money is shepherded by the school district. This gives way for accusations, and hearsay to run rampant. It's why we should as board members have to ask the hard questions so we can get fact-based answers and silence chaos.*

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?



Mitchell Response

*At the forefront of both curriculum and instruction is leadership. The glue that holds the two together is accountability support and proper training. We need to know that our educators are equipped with the skillsets they need to meet the challenges, supplies to build the experience physically, and the support that they will need when they need it from the district level.*

4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

Mitchell Response

*The goal for every board member should be to help support ideas that drive building our talent from within and retaining our best and brightest. To grow that talent we need to ensure training and enhancement opportunities are available.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

Mitchell Response

*The challenge of garnering parent and community involvement is ongoing. Thru the use of zoom and virtual meeting formats, there is an uptick that we need to pursue.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

Mitchell Response

Of paramount importance. There is a great need to review and take an entirely refreshed look at our security and make changes from too level down. Our guards deserve top notch training, and compensation.

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Melissa Muñoz Patterson**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

Patterson Response

*I am a graduate of Mount Vernon Schools, a longtime resident and a parent of two children that attend school in the district. My extended family lives in Mount Vernon as well. This is relevant*

*because I am part of the community. I am familiar with the challenges and the resources that Mount Vernon has.*

*I'm a licensed attorney in both NY and NJ, NYS licensed notary, NYS licensed insurance broker, and a NYS licensed insurance adjuster. I have my Jurist Doctorate from Hofstra University School of Law, my MBA in Finance from Iona College and my Bachelors in Business Administration from Concordia College-New York. These qualify me to be a school board trustee because I can evaluate the district's operations from multiple perspectives including as an educational institution AND a business.*

*Beyond the tangibles, are the intangibles. I'm energetic, I don't stop till a job is done, and I'm beyond driven to see our district continuing to move in the right direction. I'm positive and I believe positivity begets positivity—in MV we focus on the negatives for far too long—often to the detriment of moving forward. This qualifies me to be a school board trustee because as a non-paid volunteer—one of the strongest assets you can have is the energy to do the hard work without personal gain or glory—just to do it for the passion that I have for my community.*

2. School Financing. How local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief (sentence or two) description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

**Patterson Response**

*School bonds—school bonds are made to borrow money from an institution for the district to generally use for capital projects. That means buildings, grounds, infrastructure. These must be repaid—and our bond rating (in part) dictates the interest rate that we pay the bond back.*

*Local property taxes—are the funds that property owners pay to district that can be used for anything within the school budget.*

*Federal Entitlement Grants—are monies that are generally given to the district for a particular purpose—you can use them to supplement education, but not to take the place of spending in the budget. (This includes Title 1 for special needs education)*

*NYS Foundation Aid—the basic state aid that is not based on spending but it based on the characteristics of the community and the school population. \*There is state aid that is based on how much you spend (like transportation aid) but that is NOT included in Foundation Aid.*

*With all these varied funding sources, it is highly necessary to ensure EQUITY in the schools. We must effectively monitor that there is EQUITY in the resources that are spent within each of our buildings. \*\*Note the difference between EQUALITY AND EQUITY—Schools must get what they NEED rather than all schools getting the same thing. \*\**

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our

students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?

Patterson Response

*There are a great many things that I think need to be taught to our students:*

- 1) We need to have ROBUST CTE offerings—the fact is that not everyone is going to college. I often joke that the only person that I know who has a house in the Hamptons is my plumber (not a joke—actually the truth).*
  - 2) Our children must learn civics—how important it is to be an involved citizen. We must teach them how to be productive citizens that will share in the identity of the city of Mount Vernon for generations to come. The fact is, that we educate the young people that will eventually grow into being our neighbors, local employees and eventually local business owners. We need to teach them the skills that will guide them into those opportunities.  
The children need to learn how to navigate our world.*
  - 3) Our curriculum must be Culturally Relevant to our students in order to engage students in the learning process. They need to know what they are being taught is relevant to who they are. This can absolutely be done at the same time as preparing them to excel on state exams and to compete amongst their peers on a national and even global level.*
4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

Patterson Response

*Teacher morale usually starts with belief in the mission and vision of the instructional leadership of the school buildings and the district. This starts with my support of the appointment of the new Superintendent Dr. Bennett-Conroy. Her ability to articulate specific measurable goals and to engage all of the educators within the system in moving the district forward is something that will be an invaluable tool.*

*As a school board, we need to provide Dr. BC with the necessary resources to make sure that all staff members from the custodians, security agents, support staff—all the way up to the principals feel supported and feel that they are stakeholders in the final product that the district produces.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

Patterson Response

*We need to have an effective way to have parent's voices to be heard and at the same time give effective feedback to parents on exactly what the mission and vision of the school and the district is. We must work as partners and not adversaries. We will never agree on everything, we can have the tough discussions that in the end, everyone will feel that their voice was heard, and a fair process was followed, even if they don't agree with the ultimate result.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

Patterson Response

*The first part of security that needs to be addressed is preventing issues from occurring. The district is currently working with two different innovative security companies to both check our policies & procedures as well as ensure our staff is correctly trained. Furthermore, one of these companies brings a system into the district that can monitor online bullying and social media abuses.*

*The second part is the actual logistics of keeping a school building safe. In a society where crime statistics are being used for political purposes, I think that it is important that we give parents accurate and honest information on exactly what is occurring in the schools and at what rate. I know that when communication is communicated through third parties, it tends to get skewed. Therefore, an accurate explanation of where we're at and what is being done to improve school safety needs to be effectively communicated to all our stakeholders in the community. Children need to feel safe in schools and that can be accomplished without making them feel as though they are going to school under a police presence.*

## School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire



**Adriane Saunders**

1. Education & Experience. What elements of your education and/or experience qualify you to be a School Board Trustee?

Saunders Response

*Any resident of the city qualifies to run for the school board of trustees. I am a tax payer and I am concerned about special education and taxes. These are a few reasons why I want to be involved with the school district.*

2. School Financing. How are local property taxes, NYS foundation aid, federal entitlement grants, and school bonds used in school financing? Can you give a brief description of each of these funding sources and how they are used?

Saunders Response

*Mt. Vernon has quite a few developers with pilots which is one reason why taxes are high. The district gets about 77% per dollar spent back from the state for the bond when they submit their documents of completion. In addition to this we receive funds for special needs population. They are all broken down when the funding comes in from the state. If this is not public information then it should be*

*made public on the district website. Property taxes were \$120,947,117 for 21-22, they proposed \$121,551,853 for 22-23 school year. The state aid in 21-22 was \$110,894,155 total.*

3. Curriculum & Instruction. Are there ideas or concepts that you think are particularly important for students to learn? Are there any ideas or concepts that you think should not be taught to our students? Do you have an opinion about what is taught to students about American and world history?

Saunders Response

*Students in elementary school should start learning about finances, conflict resolution and critical issues that they may encounter growing up. They should be made aware of world news and discuss with their class.*

4. Staff Development and Retention. There is a shortage of highly qualified educators. What are your thoughts about the recruitment, development, and retention of instructors and school leaders?

Saunders Response

*There are multiple reasons for the shortage of staff. MVCSD is challenged with salaries in certain positions the surrounding areas such as Pelham, Bronxville, New Rochelle pay more. In addition to this, COVID has scared people to chose another profession or retire in order not to be face to face with people.*

5. Parent & Community Involvement. What are your thoughts about how to increase parent and community involvement with the school system? Do you have any thoughts about how to deploy school resources to help parents support students?

Saunders Response

*I think there should be parent, teacher and student involvement. Prior to Covid the district offered ELA and math night which brought that involve the. We plan to start this again in the fall.*

6. School Safety. What are your thoughts on how to improve school safety?

Saunders Response

*The district is now working on a safety wellness initiative with the police department. There is a pilot at MVHS now. The district is looking at security companies to train our security officers and monitor social media.*