



# Board of Education Candidates 2024

## An Introduction and Virtual Q&A

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The Garden City PTA believes that transparency and accessibility are paramount in ensuring an informed electorate, particularly in matters as crucial as the stewardship of our school district. For that reason, we often use our final All-Schools meeting as a forum for the community to meet and interact with Board of Education candidates prior to casting their votes. Due to scheduling conflicts, this year's final meeting falls after the elections.

In lieu of a traditional "Meet the Candidates" event, we invited each candidate to introduce themselves to our membership with a biography and responses to a set of questions crafted by our membership. Read on for the full responses from both candidates, Carl Oliveri and Kristen Pappas.

We hope these replies directly from the two candidates help our members in determining how they will cast their ballot on Election Day. Be sure to make your voice heard on Tuesday, May 21, at the GCHS polling place.

Donna Kraus

Garden City PTA President 2023-24

# Responses of Carl Oliveri

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## **BIOGRAPHY & BACKGROUND**

Hello, my name is Carl Oliveri. I am, for the most part, a lifelong resident of Garden City, and I am running for the floater trustee position on our school board.

A few brief comments about myself, for the last 4 plus years I have served on the District's audit committee. As a Certified Public Accountant and a Certified Fraud Examiner, it was the natural place to start getting involved and giving back to the schools that I am a product of, which is another reason I would like to serve at a higher level. Plus my wife and I have two children currently in the district; so I am clearly vested in the success of our schools.

I am constantly looking to give back to this Town. Growing up here and going through the schools did set me on a path to my life today. That is why I am involved in GCAA as a coach and part of program management, lead my son's Scouts den and help teach children self confidence, respect and discipline at Tiger Schulmann's here in Garden City.

The reason I am seeking election is simple, our children.

## **QUESTION 1: What are your top three priorities for the school district if elected as a Board of Education trustee, and how do you plan to address them?**

- My overall objective is to be an advocate for all of our children and the students in the Garden City Public Schools. And I recognize that priorities change based on the facts and circumstances we face. If elected, my priorities as a Board of Education trustee are:

Special Education & IEP Services – the need for resources and programs could not be clear and I do believe it is an area we need to continue to improve in and do better for our special education students. I use resources broadly to include the right teachers, facilities, tools and program access. New York's needs were recently highlighted in a Newsday article from May 5, 2024 "Pandemic Setbacks In Special Ed", without getting into the details, its eye opening.

If elected, I would propose and volunteer to be part of a task force/committee to conduct a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis of our current program and research what other districts are bringing their students – in and out of the state. I would also advocate we make sure the right resources are available to our current educators and listen to them in terms of what they need to create an environment of achievement for our special education students.

As with any business plan I have been involved in we need to state our objective and develop action items to achieve this. I would recommend the District address within these verticals:

- Recruitment and retention efforts of personnel
- Contracting with outside providers to support and enhance in District programs
- Utilization and enhancement of existing staff
- Collaboration with other districts or agencies
- Advocacy

And in the immediate we must find and implement interim solutions.

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# Responses of Carl Oliveri

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## QUESTION 1 CONTINUED:

- Explore Opportunities to Enhance Curriculum for All Students- I would like to find new education opportunities for our students. Watching my son struggle with homework begs the questions why don't we have a class to teach our children how to study and/or dissect a problem? I would also advocate to look at classes that have a focus on life skills. To date myself, this was balancing a checkbook, typing, self expression for my generation, and while those may be outdated concepts, the idea of educating our students with not only the academia but with some "street" smarts, I don't think we can ignore. We also have to find a way to afford our kids the platform to start to learn a 2nd language in elementary school. As the demographics of Long Island are quickly changing, our students need to learn different languages and forms of communication as soon as possible.
- Increase Community Participation at Board Meetings – as someone who regularly attends board meetings, I have observed the low attendance. I feel this is problematic as the decisions made at these meetings, while always well intended, could be questioned and dissected by the community after the fact. And by not attending meetings and/or engaging in the process as to how that decision came to be, the community could be missing pertinent information from the decision-making process. Attending board meetings and thoughtfully using the community feedback forum is a great way for everyone in our town to become part of the process.

To bring our community into the meetings, we need to put forth more programming highlighting our student and alumni accomplishments, invite them along with their parents or guardians to meetings for recognition purposes and to share their stories.

I would also recommend the Board put together a focus group to explore deeper community involvement or try having a meeting outside of the traditional time, perhaps pinged to a post school event, like a Harlem Wizards game, where parents are coming in droves to our facilities. We also need to encourage better communication with other groups across the town, so we don't have so many conflicting meetings

# Responses of Carl Oliveri

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## **QUESTION 2: In your opinion, where is the Board of Education currently overspending and underspending, and how would you propose reallocating funds to address these issues?**

As someone whose professional life revolves around auditing and budgeting, it is an unfortunate reality that everything costs more today. To that end, I don't believe the the District is overspending in a particular area. However, there is clearly a need for more resources for our special education students and IEP needs. Considering the number of medical conglomerates our Village currently has as corporate citizens, we should explore alternative solutions and programs with them; such as seeing if there is a way for them to provide the District with professionals to start addressing some of our needs. I would advocate for the Board of Education to research traditional and other alternative solutions with our corporate citizens. These are additional resources in our community that we should be looking at to help our kids.

It was welcomed news to see that New York State has awarded Garden City nearly \$2.4 million to enhance our Universal Pre-K program. As someone whose daughter was part of the inaugural class, I can honestly say it is a life changing program in terms of home finances, socialization, acclimating children to the public-school life and routines, and to provide early insight and intervention; not to mention the benefit to working parents' schedules. However, the program's expansion has to start with additional, adequate classroom space. In terms of spending, I would like to see how we can utilize a portion of this money to procure additional space so that the Fall 2024 class doubles in size. And that these continue to double in size annually until every resident is afforded the opportunities Universal Pre-K affords.

## **QUESTION 3: As a prospective member of the school board, what unique contributions do you believe you can offer to enhance areas such as Shared Decision Making, classroom volunteering, and home-school communication?**

I believe I have been making unique contributions to the District for the better part of the last 4 years utilizing my professional designation as a CPA and experience as an auditor serving as a member of the school board's audit committee. Understanding how to read financial reports and budgets, that auditing is about risk assessment and that sometimes auditors' default to "same as last year" has allowed me to bring a different perspective to the District when it comes to auditing and reporting on the financials. I have and will continue to challenge the District's current audit firm if I have a professional concern or question stemming from over 25 years of experience.

As a parent I will always advocate for enhanced parent-teacher communication and collaboration. Technology plays a huge part in this and I am glad we have resources such as ParentSquare at our disposal. But we should look to streamline communication, I have been caught in the cross lines of ParentSquare vs. emails.

In terms of shared decision making, our teachers and administrators are the professionals and I welcome their insights, observations and opinions when it comes to my children as students. However, ultimately the parent should be making the decision they feel is best for their child when it comes to that student's education. A collaborative approach with the common goal of best interests will never steer us wrong.

# Responses of Carl Oliveri

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## **QUESTION 4: How do you perceive the role of technology in addressing both opportunities and challenges within public education and our community?**

To start, I would urge the District to study Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how it is impacting student lives and learning. AI is not the future it is very much the now. Let's create an educational forum to teach our kids how to use AI responsibly as a tool in their education not as their education.

### *Two Opportunities:*

1. Technology gives our students access to additional educational resources ranging from research materials, information to supplement our course work to learning tools all aimed at enhancing the educational experience. It can open new paths on their educational journey and who knows what great places they will discover.
2. From my own experiences as a parent, I have seen technology help my children's learning process engagement through interactive games, like Geometry Dash, and the use of multimedia content to support the day's lesson have reinforced concepts within an engaging and enjoyable platform.

### *Two Challenges:*

1. The biggest challenge I see with technology is balance. Screen time, device fatigue should not be underestimated. While the benefits of technology as a learning tool are real, we cannot turn too far into this and replace traditional educational methods and human interaction.
2. Most everything we do these days has a technology component and with that comes increased cybersecurity and privacy concerns. We need to be aware of the risks associated with data privacy, cybersecurity, and the potential for misuse of student data when we implement any new educational technologies. These are not "plug and play" applications, the risks are greater than ever as hacking is an industry.

Technology has and will continue to play a vital role in our children's education. While I am of a generation that "hit the books", I also understand how we deliver education to our children, curriculums, and teaching methods have clearly evolved since I was last a student in our schools back in 1993. But I believe that we need a balance and blend of the tried and true with the updated and modern to give our children the best educational experience as possible while maintaining that  $1 + 1 = 2$  and that is where technology comes in.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Our Village is blessed and lucky in so many respects. The success stories that stem out of Garden City are not by mistake or chance; it is the hard work we put in today that breeds our future wins. And today our children are fortunate to have people so dedicated and vested in their education that we are seeking election to serve them as a Board of Education trustee.

For me, it is all about the client. While I am always a parent, as you have read, I have a long-term career as a CPA. I serve clients daily. And one thing that has taught me is you always do what is right for the client, to keep them out of trouble and in the best position for success. My approach to acting as a school board trustee would be no different – the students and their parents/the taxpayers are the client, and I will bring the same energy and diligence that I bring to the office to our board of education. I would be honored to have your support on May 21, 2024.

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# Responses of Kristen Pappas

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## **BIOGRAPHY & BACKGROUND**

My name is Kristen Pappas, and as a devoted mother, experienced educator, and proud community member, I am eager to announce my candidacy for Garden City Board of Education Trustee. Driven by a deep commitment to fostering inclusive, innovative, and equitable educational opportunities for all students, my professional knowledge, experiences, and proven record of action and advocacy make me an ideal candidate to continue supporting our Garden City community.

## **PROUD MOM**

My husband, Joseph, and I met as teachers in the South Bronx and moved to the Garden City neighborhood in 2014. We are the proud parents of two children: a sixth grader attending Garden City Middle School and a fourth grader at Stewart School. We cherish our close-knit community that prioritizes and nurtures the well-being of our children, investing in experiences both in and out of the classroom.

## **EXPERIENCED EDUCATOR**

Following my undergraduate studies at Northwestern University, I pursued a Master's Degree in Social Work from New York University. As a Legal Aid Society social worker, I collaborated with attorneys, therapists, and other professionals to ensure children's needs were met and their legal rights were upheld. During that work, I determined that I wanted to cultivate positive classroom learning experiences for children, and I began my teaching career in the South Bronx as a New York City Teaching Fellow. Seventeen years later, I passionately create learning environments in my classroom that foster curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity.

Currently, in my tenth year as an elementary special educator in the Great Neck Public Schools, I strongly advocate for my students and work collaboratively with parents, teachers, administration, and related service providers to ensure their highest-quality educational experience. Committed to my ongoing professional learning, I engage with current research on effective pedagogical practices, particularly with an emphasis on early literacy, and hold a Wilson Reading certification and training through the Institute of Multisensory Education.

## **ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE PTA**

An active member of the Garden City PTA, I designed and organized the "Don't Pass the Flash Campaign" while co-chairing the GC PTA Health and Safety Committee, as well as organized a district-wide drive to supply elementary classrooms with materials to enrich their play experiences during indoor recess. I served on the Site-Based, Interview, and Legislative Committees and as a class parent. Through my involvement in the PTA, I built and will continue cultivating strong relationships with families, educators, and stakeholders.

## **WHY ME?**

As a community member, parent, and educator, my priorities will be ensuring our tax dollars are invested thoughtfully, directly impacting and enhancing the education of our children. I know education, and my professional knowledge and experiences are dedicated to creating positive educational experiences for children. Since moving into the neighborhood, it has been an honor to serve the community and volunteer my time to help and improve our schools in collaboration with parents, other teachers, administrators, and stakeholders, and I would be honored to continue serving our Garden City community and ask for your vote on May 21, 2024.

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# Responses of Kristen Pappas

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## **QUESTION 1: What are your top three priorities for the school district if elected as a Board of Education trustee, and how do you plan to address them?**

One priority is to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education that caters to their diverse needs and potentials. In order to do that well, it is imperative that we maintain smaller class sizes so that students can do their best learning with more individualized attention from their teachers. Providing strong foundational literacy skills and supporting our teachers in utilizing research-based instructional methods that deliver the highest impact and results will help give our students the essential tools necessary for lifelong learning and success. Additionally, we need to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students, including those in special education. The issue of children receiving related services experiencing service loss and inconsistencies with providers calls for a long-term solution to address staffing issues. It is essential to create a culture of inclusion and acceptance within our schools, where students with disabilities are valued members of the community and have equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of school life. This may involve fostering positive relationships between students with and without disabilities and implementing inclusive teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities.

Another priority would be to continue strengthening the partnership between the schools, parents, and the community, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. Continuing to provide opportunities for parents and community members to share their thoughts and feedback through committees and surveys is crucial for fostering a collaborative and transparent educational environment. Over the course of this academic year, our district organized a Special Education Advisory Committee, and as a result of this Committee, some actionable items were determined. As a result of Committee recommendations, at the Board of Education meeting on May 14, the district announced an online platform that will help inform families of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in our schools and the special education process. I look forward to participating and further expanding that kind of collaborative work between stakeholders and the Garden City School District, and believe that my experiences as both an educator and parent member and leader of school-based and district-based committees will support this work.

Maintaining and improving our physical learning spaces, while including stakeholders in these decisions equitably across all buildings in the district, is another priority of mine. It is critical that we maintain and upgrade our school facilities, prioritizing the maintenance and upgrades that directly impact student safety, learning environments, and extracurricular activities. Improvements should be equitable across all buildings so that, no matter which school our children attend, they have access to high-quality learning spaces and recreational facilities of the same quality.

Although these are some of my priorities, I understand that if elected as a Board of Education Trustee, I look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with fellow Board Trustees, district administrators, teachers, parents, and members of the community in order to be responsive to the constituents I serve.

# Responses of Kristen Pappas

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## **QUESTION 2: In your opinion, where is the Board of Education currently overspending and underspending, and how would you propose reallocating funds to address these issues?**

Since moving into the neighborhood in 2014, I have attended Board of Education meetings and kept informed of our school budget process. As a district, I would like to applaud the Board and our district administrators for consistently preparing a budget that is within the Property Tax Cap Limit, maintains many of our programs and resources, and makes significant improvements along the way. Their careful planning and fiscal responsibility ensure that we continue to provide high-quality education and support for our students while being mindful of our community's financial constraints and I look to contribute to these goals in the role of a Board of Education Trustee.

If elected, I would work collaboratively with fellow Board members to analyze current spending patterns to ensure that resources are being used effectively and efficiently. We need to conduct reviews of the budget to identify and eliminate wasteful spending, prioritize funding for programs and resources that have a direct impact on student learning and well-being, and advocate for investments in educational materials and facilities that best support our students' learning. According to the data provided in 2024/2025 Budget Presentation, Garden City School District spending per pupil is \$21,857, which is comparatively less than many competitive neighboring districts such as North Shore, Manhasset, and Port Washington, to name a few. Most importantly, my goal is to work with fellow board members to define clear, student-centered priorities that guide budget allocations, focusing on initiatives that directly enhance student learning and well-being. By engaging all stakeholders - teachers, administrators, parents, and school and local community members, I will collaboratively work to determine the priorities and needs for our children and our district.

## **QUESTION 3: As a prospective member of the school board, what unique contributions do you believe you can offer to enhance areas such as Shared Decision Making, classroom volunteering, and home-school communication?**

I bring a strong background in fostering collaborative relationships through my professional leadership roles in the field of education, as well as parent leadership roles in the Garden City PTA through different committee participation. According to Commissioner's Regulation 100.11, the school district requires a plan for the participation of parents and teachers in school-based planning and shared decision making. Along with fellow board members, it is important to review our district's plan and ensure that we are being reflective on the success at which this partnership is occurring in our schools. Shared decision making through Site Based Committees provides an opportunity for parents, teachers, and administrators to work towards goals to support our students. According to our district plan, the building-level committees should be brought together at a district level so that they can reflect upon the work that was done towards achieving those goals. As someone who has actively participated on Shared Decision Making Committees in my district of employment, as well as in the Garden City Schools, I can appreciate the value of the collaboration and the way in which these site based committees support our school district collectively, in addition to contributing to the needs of each individual school community.

My experience as an educator has taught me the value of listening to parents' concerns and feedback. I will promote the creation of regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, and open forums, to gather input from parents and community members and use it to inform school policies and practices, ensuring that the school board remains responsive to and representative of the community's needs.

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# Responses of Kristen Pappas

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**QUESTION 4: How do you perceive the role of technology in addressing both opportunities and challenges within public education and our community?**

As a candidate for the Board of Education, I recognize that technology plays a pivotal role in addressing both opportunities and challenges within public education and our community. Tools such as interactive whiteboards, virtual labs, and educational apps make learning more engaging and accessible, helping to capture students' interest and enhance the learning experiences for our teachers and students. While technology can enhance learning, excessive screen time can have negative effects on students' health and well-being. Promoting a balanced approach to technology use, incorporating both digital and offline activities, can help mitigate these risks. It is important that we provide opportunities for our students to have hands-on experiential activities that enrich their learning and create important interdisciplinary connections. When considering the use of technology, it is imperative to evaluate the ways technology can be utilized as an enhancement to augment student learning experiences as opposed to a replacement for alternate methods. By intentionally and meaningfully leveraging our district's technological resources, we can cultivate media literacy skills and digital citizenship in our students to support and empower them throughout their educational experiences and their journeys beyond Garden City.