



FHPS BOARD OF EDUCATION 2022 ELECTION

---

# **SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY**

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY

Public schools are a vital part of every community and in Forest Hills, our schools are a point of shared pride. The district's high schools rank within the top 5% nationally (U.S. News & World Report) and motivates families from around the country to enroll their students in the Forest Hills Public Schools (FHPS) K-12 "experience."

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE 2022 ELECTIONS & SUPPORT FHPS

Electing qualified, pro-public education candidates into these board seats is essential to the future of the district. Over the past year, school boards across the country have come into stronger focus due to:

1. The desire to force partisan agendas into our public schools that have always been non-partisan
2. An effort to shift support and funding away from public schools into privatized or "for-profit" education, voucher or "opportunity scholarship" programs, and charters

Support FHPS launched in 2021 as a 100% local volunteer committee to protect the integrity of the district from unwarranted disruption. We are a collaboration of current FHPS families, classroom volunteers, PTO members and Foundation donors who believe in the strength and potential of our schools.



We confront disinformation planted nationally by pro-privatization think tanks and hyper-partisan politicians and continue to advocate for the Support, Safety and Success of all students.

Our executive committee of four spends countless hours talking with parent groups in school districts around the country, reviewing education policies and reading articles. We've been invited to join the national Network for Public Education, the Michigan Education Justice Coalition, and the Students' Rights Coalition. But our support of public education does not mean we're complacent. We're focused on locally relevant issues and raise our own policy recommendations with Forest Hills Public Schools.

The seven-seat Forest Hills Board of Education works with the superintendent to ensure district policies, procedures, and programs are continually assessed against the shared vision for the district.

In November 2022, four of those seats are up for election:

- Three seats to be elected to a six-year term (general election)
- One seat to be elected to a two-year term (special election to complete a partial vacated term)

There are no primary elections. All candidates will be listed on the ballot.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY

## Candidate Survey

Inspired by our deep work with education organizations, we created a survey to gather input from the large pool of candidates vying for these open seats and help inform the voting public.

We know the strongest Board of Education candidates tend to hold these qualities:

- They enter with a desire to serve the public and support public education opposed to coming in with a timely “axe to grind.” This is a six-year term that outlasts many short-lived issues
- They prioritize objective thinking and analysis for decision-making, allowing for healthy conflict and civil discourse to guide outcomes

## CANDIDATE RESPONSE LIST

### 6 YEAR TERM:

Suzanne Callahan  
Kevinn Matthew Donovan  
Jessica Johns  
C.J. Michaud  
Malorie Ninemeier  
Justin Sheldon  
Brian Spratke



### DECLINED TO RESPOND:

Holly DeBoer  
Robert Cribbs  
Doug Lee  
Jackie Nickel

### 2 YEAR TERM:

Ed Aboufadel  
Mary Vonck

All candidates were supplied the survey with a corresponding deadline. There are many themes that arose in candidate responses, along with several ideas for the future.

Continue to follow SupportFHPS.org to learn more about the 2022 Board of Education election.

**Remember to vote on November 8.**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

- 1. Are you an incumbent? If so, how many years have you served on the Board of Education?..... p. 5
- 2. How long have you lived in the district? ..... p. 6
- 3. Why do you want to be a school board member?..... p.7
- 4. List any organizations, clubs, teams, volunteering, etc. you are involved with in Forest Hills Public Schools and/or the surrounding communities. ....p. 10
- 5. What are some factors on which you will base your decisions as a school board member?..... p. 13
- 6. What do you think building better relationships with students, parents & caregivers can look like in your school district?.....p. 15
- 7. What are your views on open data and transparency of information? What kinds of school district information should be made public? .....p. 17
- 8. What should be your school district’s top spending priorities in their budget? Alternatively, what should not be prioritized in your district’s budget? ..... p. 19
- 9. If you could have an impact on your school district’s curriculum, what changes would you make? What, if anything, would you keep the same? .....p. 21
- 10. What are your top priorities around special education in your district?..... p. 23
- 11. What mental health supports, services, and classes do you think are needed in your district? What will you do as a school board member to support students’ and staffs’ mental and emotional health/well-being? ..... p. 25
- 12. What is your vision for the future of education? Do you agree with the district’s “21st Century Learning” plan? What would you add or change?.....p. 27
- 13. What do you believe the district has done well over the past five years? Where are the strongest areas for improvement?..... p. 29
- 14. What programs will you work to build and/or expand that support career readiness and vocational programs?.....p. 32
- 15. What role do you think standardized tests should play in your school district? ..... p. 34
- 16. What outputs are you most concerned with when measuring district success?..... p. 36
- 17. How do you think your school district should make schools a safe place for students and staff?..... p. 38
- 18. What do you think are the biggest challenges currently at FHPS? In the next 5-10 years? ..... p. 40
- 19. What do you think are the biggest successes at FHPS?.....p. 42
- 20. What are 1-2 things you think FHPS could do to enhance the Support, Safety and/or Success of all students?..... p. 44



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #1

---

## 1. Are you an incumbent? If so, how many years have you served on the Board of Education?

**ABOUFADEL:** No, I am not an incumbent.

**CALLAHAN:** I have been on the Board of Education since 2015. I was appointed to fill Dr Jim Fahner's position and was elected in November 2016.

**DONOVAN:** No, I am not an incumbent.

**JOHNS:** I am not an incumbent.

**MICHAUD:** I was honored to be appointed to the Board of Education out of a pool of 27 candidates in March, 2022. Thus, I will have served roughly 6 months when school resumes in the fall. When newly-elected Board members start in January, 2023, I feel I will still very much be "fresh eyes" on the Board but with a 9-month head start!

**NINEMEIER:** No

**SHELDON:** No

**SPRATKE:** No, I am not an incumbent.

**VONCK:** Yes, I am an incumbent. I was elected in May of 2004, so I am in my 19th year of board service.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #2

---

## 2. How long have you lived in the district?

**ABOUFADEL:** My family and I moved to Ada in 2006. After my wife's sister and her family moved to Ada so that their kids could be educated in the Forest Hills Public Schools, we followed. We used to live in Walker.

My wife Kathy and I have one son, Zachary, and he was educated in FHPS for over a decade, graduating from Forest Hills Central in 2017, before moving on to Grand Valley State University. He played on the varsity hockey team at FHC, and from GVSU, he received his bachelor's degree in mathematics and statistics in 2021. For our in-laws, they have three children. One graduated from Forest Hills Northern several years ago, a second is a student there, and a third is in middle school.

**CALLAHAN:** I moved to our current residence in Forest Hills in June of 2000. I have lived in the Grand Rapids area since 1991.

**DONOVAN:** I've lived in the district for 8 years.

**JOHNS:** I have lived in the district 12 years.

**MICHAUD:** My whole life! I attended K-12 in FHPS and graduated from Forest Hills Northern. I have lived here ever since (except for 6 of my 7 college years) and now have 4 young children who all attend/ will attend FHPS.

**NINEMEIER:** 7 years

**SHELDON:** Ten years.

**SPRATKE:** I have lived in the Forest Hills school district for 22 years.

**VONCK:** I moved to Forest Hills in 1991. We started as an Ada Elementary family in 1998, became part of the Eastern attendance area when Knapp Forest opened in 2003, and experienced life on Northern campuses with our Spanish Immersion students. When adding Goodwillie to the mix, our children's Forest Hills education spanned nine buildings and afforded me a wonderful opportunity to witness phenomenal teaching and learning all over the district.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #3

---

## 3. Why do you want to be a school board member?

**ABOUFADEL:** I have been interested in public service and politics all of my life. Until this year, my public service has been in support of the national scientific community, while for politics, I have volunteered for several campaigns. As the narratives in our local, state, and national community has evolved, I feel it is time to leave the sidelines and join the fray.

Being a school board member is a good fit with my talents and experience. I am a product of public education – K-12 schooling in Illinois and Indiana, bachelor's degree from Michigan State University, a doctorate from Rutgers University, more than two decades working at Grand Valley State University – and I embrace the philosophy that public education is for all. It is a path to educated and engaged citizenship. This idea is captured in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which eventually led to the establishment of Michigan as a state: "Knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

Ultimately, as a school board member, I would want to be known for the following: Promoting excellent, welcoming schools, offering creative and evidence-based leadership, to help our kids to thrive and our democracy to prosper.

**CALLAHAN:** School represents the potential and possibility for individuals and communities and I choose to be supportive of and volunteer with people who are excited about the future of education. Our schools are the engine for the future workforce, the pipeline to new scientific discoveries, a gateway to great artistic and athletic accomplishments, and more. How could I not want to be involved?

While board members are not involved in day to day operations of the district, the enthusiasm and trust we put in the staff who educate our students goes along way to the success and positive culture in our schools. I expect Forest Hills to be the preferred choice when people choose a place to work, play and call home. I will continue to serve as a positive, forward thinking, trustworthy and energetic representative of our community where people feel proud of our schools.

**DONOVAN:** I'm running for the Forest Hills Board of Education for the following reasons. I've had four children in the School District with two still in attendance. Over the years I've experienced many changes in our community and schools that are troubling and not seriously being addressed. For example, drugs, vaping and alcohol use are on the rise. Transportation and bus issues have become a challenge that have never been contemplated before. Other issues such as masks and vaccines have divided our community and created tension that should not exist effect the classroom. At the same time, my children come home with stories about teachers preaching politics in the classroom (regardless of party) instead of focusing on the core principals. For these reasons and more, I've decided to run for the Board of Education to ensure our children are the getting the best education they can.

**JOHNS:** Serving as a member on the FHPS board is a great way for me to help support academic excellence for all students within our district. I desire to support our students through working in collaboration with the administration as they create strategies to make sure our curriculum is aligned for all students to not only be successful but to thrive in the process. I am eager to support a culture of learning that drives innovation and creativity at all grade levels. I want to focus on the whole student and understanding their unique skills and passions and how those passions can be connected to 21st century learning.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #3

---

## 3. Why do you want to be a school board member? (continued)

**MICHAUD:** I knew many board members when I was attending FHPS and have always desired to serve the district in this capacity. I have incredible pride and passion for FHPS and a very personal stake (for at least the next 17 consecutive years!) in maintaining it as the top-tier education system that served me so well. My main reason for joining the Board of Education was to ensure that one question continues to be asked when assessing all district business: "Is this what is best for our kids?" I recognize the tone, landscape, and intensity surrounding school boards has changed across the country, and I believe I was appointed in March because of my objective, data-driven, and intelligent approach to issues that filters out noise and focuses entirely on serving the kids, families, and employees of the district. I also feel that misinformation and miscommunication are problems that too often distract from our kids and their amazing achievements; to this end, I have made it a focus of mine to address how the school board and district interface with the community and address concerns. Finally, I have respect for all people and opinions and employ a "listen first" approach to all community concerns. In my time on the board I have met with many individual community members holding a wide range of views. Each one has expanded my perspective, and I fully believe our disagreements and divisions can be reconciled through respectful, open-minded conversations.

**NINEMEIER:** I am running for one of the open six-year term positions on the Forest Hills School Board of Education because I will be a voice for thoughtful and reasonable decision-making that is not politically or personally motivated. I want our kids to have a well-rounded education, where they are able to achieve their individual potential and learn to interact with the diverse world around them. My hope is for them to have a positive school experience in a safe environment. Forest Hills is already a strong community, and I will collaborate with the other board members and superintendent to ensure its continued success.

**SHELDON:** I have a deep love for public education. I am a product of public education, and I teach at a state university. I see the value of a solid education and I see the damage a poor education has on a student in my classroom every semester. I want to be a school board member because I want to see Forest Hills continue to do a good job preparing their students for college, and to protect the integrity of the education its students receive.

**SPRATKE:** I have three children in the FHC schools. They range from elementary through high school, through which I have been an active volunteer. I see this as providing me with an opportunity to be more deeply involved with the educational environment. I am confident I would be an asset to the district by bringing new perspectives which have come from my children moving through the levels of school.

My experience working at Dematic will benefit me in supporting the district. I have collaborated with teams across the country and around the world. I would bring this collaborative view to the board and make sure to listen to all points of view while working towards solutions.

**VONCK:** Contributing to the district vision of "all learners achieving individual potential" has been a privilege and a gift. I will always embrace the opportunity to do what is best for kids, and board service certainly provides that opportunity.

A more relevant question may be, "Why do I want to be a school board member NOW?" Our board lost twelve years of experience, wisdom and history with the resignation of one (continued)





# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #3

---

### 3. Why do you want to be a school board member? (continued)

of our trustees in March. That will leave our board with less than 16 years of cumulative experience on January 1. Our board was required by state law to meet virtually from March 2020 until March 2021, further impacting the on-boarding process. For sake of comparison, on January 1, 2021, our cumulative board service amounted to 65 years. That history and experience was of great value to me and all who have served with me, as governance and accountability are critical and yet very complex issues for school boards. I have served under two superintendents and four board presidents, and I participated in a superintendent search and selection process. I am happy to extend my tenure by two years to afford our board twelve more years of growth, especially as we engage in an exciting strategic planning process and support teaching and learning as we confront the reality of a teacher shortage and educators leaving the profession.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #4

---

## 4. List any organizations, clubs, teams, volunteering, etc. you are involved with in Forest Hills Public Schools and/or the surrounding communities.

**ABOUFADEL:** Currently, I am a member of the board of Voters Not Politicians, a voter-led statewide organization seeking political reform to reduce gerrymandering and promoting freedom-to-vote ballot initiatives.

When our son Zachary was younger, I served on the local board of JDRF (in support of research to prevent, treat, and cure type-1 diabetes). I was the Research Information Volunteer.

For the past two decades I have been the lead writer of blog that analyzes gasoline prices (The Gas Game). I am certain some of our readers live in the district.

**CALLAHAN:** Many of my personal and professional interests overlap and align with the mission of Forest Hills Public Schools. As a bookfair mom, PTO volunteer, Forest Hills Foundation Gala chair and advocate, I have rolled up my sleeves for what totaled over 17 years and incalculable miles within our district alone. I still stand at the ready to jump into the concession stand as needed and will happily run a teacher appreciation lunch clean up if you call me.

From a professional and volunteer perspective, much of what I do is focused upon education, career development, business strategy and organizational culture. I volunteer with KConnect as well as Discover Manufacturing, two organizations dedicated to student success beyond their K-12 experience. I spend my days working with business leaders and hiring managers assessing skills gaps on a local, regional, national and international level which better informs me of the world of work in which our students must be prepared to enter. For over 25 years, I have been learning alongside traditional and adult learners in business classes where the best of academic thought can be applied to real world problems. Work, family, school are all intertwined for me.

**DONOVAN:** In my eight years within the district I have spoken annually to Sophomores and Seniors about my career path and use that platform to guide them in thinking about the future and goal setting. I've have been a multi year member of the Superintendents Circle with the Forest Hills Foundation. I've chaperoned the 8th grade Mackinaw field trip for my children. Performed many of the duties that surround being a parent of a Goodwillie student. I've sponsored a team for the Forest Hills Booster Annual Golf outing. Was a consistent donor to the Forest Hills Eastern Orchestra while my children participated. Professionally, I volunteer annually with Mel Trotter Industries during my employers Community Week and attend charitable events as they arise.

**JOHNS:** I am the co-founder and executive director for a local nonprofit called The StoreHouse. My focus is on equity in education and equitable opportunity in our community. I volunteer at my local church, Frontline Community. I am a member of the Jandernoa Entrepreneurial Mentoring class of 2024. I was a Leadership Grand Rapids Cohort member of the class of 2021. I volunteer at North End Community Ministries, a local food bank. I have been asked to be one of 22 professionals who will act as mentors to the incoming FHE senior class this year to help instill leadership skills. I am a member of the International Society of Female Professionals.

**MICHAUD:** With young children (who entered public school during the pandemic), my opportunities for involvement in the schools have been limited to date. But I am excited to change that and (continued)



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #4

---

## 4. List any organizations, clubs, teams, volunteering, etc. you are involved with in Forest Hills Public Schools and/or the surrounding communities. (continued)

enjoyed volunteering in my daughter's first grade classroom last year. I am also passionate about music, and I have been fortunate to remain connected with the arts in FHPS by playing in the pit orchestras for over 20 FHN, FHE, and Summerstock musicals (including Shrek this fall with FHN). In the community, I coach multiple AYSO soccer teams and provide music for multiple local churches.

**NINEMEIER:** Thornapple Elementary PTO - Treasurer, Westminster Presbyterian Children and Families committee

**SHELDON:** 2012 - present - local precinct delegate  
2018 - present - GVSU LGBTQ Alumni Advisory Board  
2020 - Democratic candidate for Kent County Commissioner, district 11  
(at the time it included Grand Rapids Township, Ada Township, and 1 precinct of East Grand Rapids)  
2018 - present - lead organizer and founder of the Grand Rapids Township Democratic Club

**SPRATKE:** I am currently on the leadership committee and an Eagle Scout coach for my son's Boy Scout troop in Ada, and before that I was a leader in his Cub Scout pack. These roles with the Boy Scouts have given me experience in helping to coach kids through rank advancements and merit badge requirements.

While my son was in TVBL, I was an active parent and made sure to assist the coaches during games and practices.

Most recently I have been an active volunteer with both the FHC Wrestling and Crew programs. I have enjoyed the opportunity to run scoreboards, event set up and take down, as well as spending the time driving a launch boat down the river from the boat house to downtown Grand Rapids for a regatta.

**VONCK:** I oversee Project Charlie and support Project Chuck, the district's substance abuse prevention programs, for fifth through eighth grade students. I accepted this position when the district agreed to transition from adult to student facilitators. My responsibilities include training high school student facilitators to deliver curriculum to the younger students and supporting the facilitators' teaching both in and outside of the classroom. Research and our district surveys prove the impact on the learners is significantly greater when taught by high school students than when taught by adults. The unexpected benefit is the impact the experience has on the high school students who develop 21st century skills and enjoy using their talents to serve others while bolstering their confidence and experiencing the joy of learning. Working with these students is truly a highlight of my year!

While serving on the FHE Academic Boosters board when my kids were in school, I launched the moderated college panel our three academics boosters groups hold each fall. This is an opportunity for families to direct questions to a panel of college admissions counselors representing in-state and out-of-state, private and public, large and small post-secondary institutions. Turnout increases year after year, and I am thrilled the FHC, FHE, and FHN Academic Booster groups continue to invite me to organize and facilitate the event.

In support of our superintendent's vision to create 21st century learning environments and experiences for our students, I organized the district's first Student Advisory Council, (continued)

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #4

---

## 4. List any organizations, clubs, teams, volunteering, etc. you are involved with in Forest Hills Public Schools and/or the surrounding communities. (continued)

where high school students meet regularly with Superintendent Behm to discuss their high school experience. I support the Council's leadership team in planning meetings, formulating agendas, and seeking input from all council members. Student voice is a top indicator of student success, both academically and personally, as evidenced by the incredibly warm and positive feedback student representatives share each year.

As a Forest Hills parent, I served as PTO president at my kids' three elementary schools and on Academic, Athletic, Band, Orchestra, and Theater Booster boards at their high schools as well. In addition to supporting those who supported my kids, I was incredibly grateful to play a part in all Forest Hills offers our kids as a means of informing my board service.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #5

---

## 5. What are some factors on which you will base your decisions as a school board member?

**ABOUFADEL:** It is important that decisions are evidence-based, which means that real data and facts are taken into consideration. In addition, members of the community need to feel they have a voice, and venues such as school board meetings are a place to be heard. Ideally, when it comes to decision making, evidence and beliefs will align.

**CALLAHAN:** The lens through which I along with my fellow board members makes decisions is consistent. "What is best for kids?" What community members may not realize is this same question is posed seamlessly throughout the organization which makes board decisions fairly straightforward. By the time recommendations are brought through committees to full board review, teachers, staff, instructional design specialists, curriculum experts, financial professionals and/or human resource team members have done their job and brought forth agenda items at a district level, this question has been asked and well reasoned proposals are shared. Forest Hills invests in highly qualified staff members and consults with subject matter experts to bring forth appropriate research/presentations/data for board consideration.

**DONOVAN:** The first and foremost factor is what is in the best interest of students, parents and community (in that order).

**JOHNS:** I will listen and assess every topic and every proposal with the student's best interests at the center of my decision making. I will take a collaborative approach to make sure the ideas and thoughts of others have been heard and considered. I will take into consideration our strategic initiatives to make sure that decisions are in alignment with the greater goals of the district. I will process the decision with the community's values in mind.

**MICHAUD:** My approach to each issue facing the district will be through a lens of, "What is best for our kids?" I focus heavily on ensuring attention is paid to all students in the district so everyone can benefit from new programs and policies. For example, how would a curriculum change impact our high-performing students, under-performing students, special needs students, English language learners, teachers, and support staff? This scrutiny was recently applied to the district's decision to purchase IXL for all students to help address learning loss that occurred during the pandemic. As an intensive care unit pharmacist, I am a huge advocate of "evidenced-based" decision making that is not biased by personal or political beliefs. For new programs, I consistently ask to see and critically review the underlying data. While I do think I have a perspective that reflects the Forest Hills community at large, I think decisions that impact our nearly 10,000 FHPS kids should be as data-driven as possible to make sure we are being good stewards of district resources and putting forth the most cutting-edge learning opportunities in our schools. I would also like to state clearly that my decisions will NOT be based on or influenced by political beliefs. The Board of Education exists to make sure the focus stays on kids. In my opinion, campaigning with political ideologies, accepting endorsements from political entities, or planning to bring any type of political bias to this position is contradictory to what Board service is all about and only serves to further take focus away from our kids. Rather than Republican or Democrat, I will always identify on the Board as Pro-Public Education and Pro-Kids. I will continue to decline political party endorsements and do my part to keep the FHPS Board of Education an objective, non-partisan body.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #5

---

## 5. What are some factors on which you will base your decisions as a school board member? (continued)

**NINEMEIER:** How does this decision affect the safety and well-being of our students, teachers and staff? Will this decision assist in success for all students and their individual needs? How does this decision ensure our teachers are in the best position to help our students? Will all students feel supported in the path they choose? Do parents and the community feel the expectations of communication and transparency are met? Have we discussed options with experts in the matter at hand?

**SHELDON:** As a trained historian I was taught to do extensive research and analyze documents on complex and emotional topics and to come up with a central thesis backed up by evidence. If I earn enough votes and am elected, I will bring this historians mindset and will tackle every issue with research, analyzing objective evidence, and making the best possible vote that I can.

**SPRATKE:** I always try to make my decisions based on knowledge, experience, and varying viewpoints. If I don't know something I research it, so I can become informed. As a school board member, I would take this same approach and work with teachers, administrators, and parents, finding solutions that try to serve a wide range of needs, while knowing this will require compromise.

**VONCK:** The primary responsibilities of a board of education are to educate its students and to adopt a responsible budget that supports the district's vision. My decisions, then, are always filtered through the lens of what is best for kids.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #6

---

## 6. What do you think building better relationships with students, parents and caregivers can look like in your school district?

**ABOUFADEL:** The key to building and strengthening relationships is to maintain lines of communication, so you must have venues for dialogue, and all need to be able to listen. School board members need to be visible in the Forest Hills community – at school and district events and meetings, and even places like the grocery store – and available for conversation.

At the end of the day, the health of these relationships depends upon establishing trust, which comes back to decision-making. Trust comes from making decisions that make sense to people, with the best interests of our kids and our schools in mind, and by clearly communicating the reasoning behind those decisions.

**CALLAHAN:** (did not respond)

**DONOVAN:** Building better relationships with students, parents and caregivers in our district assumes that the relationship that exists can always use improvement. As a parent in the district, I believe the relationship between the Board of Education, the Administration and Teachers and Staff can be made better by providing transparency, working through committees especially those dealing with sensitive initiatives and seeking feedback through better and ongoing communications.

**JOHNS:** At the grade school level a few years ago they implemented a program for incoming families to be welcomed by families familiar with the district. I believe as a district we could focus on more intentionality brought to encouraging more connectedness with families who might be struggling with issues related to education, mental health of their children or community connectedness as a whole.

As administration, regularly communicating with parents is essential. It is important to be transparent and communicate the good and the bad. We must learn to foster two way communication between students and administration as well as parents and administration. Promoting active and engaged listening for understanding rather than responding is a way to model how to be respectful of one another and build these health relationships.

**MICHAUD:** I believe relationships start with hearing and listening. We need to have more opportunities for the community to question and understand what happens in the district. To that end, I support holding events for the community to provide input when decisions are being made as well as forums where constituents can openly ask questions to gain clarity and confidence in the district's plans. A hypothetical example: FHPS holds an event at the Fine Arts Center around the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) that is free for all to attend. There would be a number of presentations from key district players to describe what it is, what it is not, where it comes from, what data support sit, what it will look like in the schools, etc. Then, there would be a question and answer session for the community. This would be different than public comment at Board meetings, where rules limit the ability to have back-and-forth conversation. The Q&A would allow the district to understand any community concerns, speak to them, and if/when necessary make plans to address them before moving forward. I see this as a great way to keep students, parents, and caregivers informed, engaged, and empowered in FHPS, and it would help us reforge unity and strengthen our relationships throughout the district.

**NINEMEIER:** Open, honest and timely communication with all affected parties. Transparency on what and how decisions are being made. Collaborating with different parties in decision making when appropriate.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #6

---

## 6. What do you think building better relationships with students, parents and caregivers can look like in your school district? (continued)

**SHELDON:** Building better relationships with students, parents and caregivers is a major key for district success. There should be a system in place to handle parent concerns in a timelier manner; proper channels to follow and resolutions documented to increase transparency. Parents have spoken at board meetings repeatedly with issues not being resolved; some of them serious and involving staff/coaches, and those need to be addressed timely to build trust within the community. FHPS should focus promoting how parents/caregivers can be involved in their individual schools with PTOs, Booster Groups, etc as there does seem to be a lack of across-the-board participation for volunteers based on my conversations with parents/caregivers across the district. Utilizing their platforms to reach across the district encouraging involvement in a variety of ways would be helpful. The current Parent Advisory Council seems not fully transparent; meetings should be filmed, shared and meeting minutes released so everyone knows what is going on in the district. Listening sessions with students would be another way to deepen relationships and earn the confidence of students that they are being heard - concerns, wants, needs. What better way to enhance our district by building those relationships with our youngest residents? A district wide student council at each level (elementary, middle, high school) would be an additional way to hear the voices of the students while teaching them the importance of civics in our community. Transparency across the board, including live streaming of BOE meetings, would be a top priority if elected. Everyone in the community should have access to the BOE meetings live, because it's not possible for everyone to attend due to time constraints, lack of evening childcare, etc. I believe in hearing from the parents/caregivers on what they would like to see in the form of a SWAT analysis which would be a good starting point in addition to the suggestions above.

**SPRATKE:** I would spend the beginning of my term listening to, and understanding the issues. One issue I feel exists today is lack of consistent meaningful communication. I would work to strengthen communication between the varying components of the district. For me, communicating isn't just sending out more emails. It is knowing the challenges we all face as a district. We need to find better ways to keep parents informed as we work to provide a world class education in this evolving world.

**VONCK:** Our board values our partnership with our families and community members as we empower our students to live full, healthy, happy, independent lives. When our state shut down in March of 2020, the occasional email to our board seeking guidance or information turned into hundreds of emails from parents in fear, without information, in need of direction, and combatting issues of isolation, lack of resources, and struggling kids. Technology affords us the ability to communicate much more quickly and efficiently; it also limits what we can gain through a discussion. These emails turned into over 1,000 phone conversations with parents in our district and led to great learning opportunities. We connected parents with administrators in ongoing discussions about the challenges confronting schools across the country. We also organized meetings of two or three board members and small groups of parents who genuinely wanted to understand how the board and district work together and how our community can support that work. That discussion needs to continue and supports our goal to enhance and prioritize communication among all stakeholders in our district and continue to tell the stories of all the great teaching and learning happening in Forest Hills.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #7

---

## 7. What are your views on open data and transparency of information? What kinds of school district information should be made public?

**ABOUFADEL:** My general approach to this question is that there are better outcomes when more are involved in reviewing data and information. There are limits to what a group of decision-makers can see and process, so having more eyes on a problem can lead to a better solution. In addition, in situations with a lack of information, it is human nature to be tempted to invent a darker narrative.

As to what should be made public, first we need to ensure that FHPS is meeting all legal requirements for providing information. With those requirements met, the question becomes what other information should be available to help maintain trust between the board and the community. I think the answer will be clear if the lines of communication (that I discussed in the previous question) are open.

**CALLAHAN:** Forest Hills Public Schools is a government funded institution and is required to and complies with all data and transparency requirements by law. The school district is governed by detailed bylaws and policies. These policies and bylaws are in accordance with Federal and State regulations covering public schools. To view those, click here: <https://meetings.boardbook.org/Public/Organization/691>

There are extensive financial records that are made available as well here. <https://www.fhps.net/departments/business-office/transparency/>

Forest Hills Public Schools is transparent with data and information for board decision making and community consumption and review.

**DONOVAN:** Data speaks for itself and transparency is the back bone of building trust as a result of the data. Any school wants to have a strong and healthy relationship with its community, must be transparent with that community. I support full and open transparency from sharing the curriculum, to the budget, to construction projects including change orders, to public access to financial records. The community should have access to this information. This would exclude personnel files and student files which should be confidential.

**JOHNS:** I think that there are benefits to open data that encourages understanding and engagement. I understand there can be concerns of misinterpreting data by taking it out of context which can cause other challenges. I believe there are effective ways that the district can further engage in keeping parents informed about decisions that are made at the district level. I support investigating the transparency of information shared to the public as long as we are keeping the students best interest as the primary purpose for data sharing.

**MICHAUD:** I believe the community-public school interface has changed and that all school districts should review the ways they engage with their constituents. FHPS is home to an incredibly knowledgeable and supportive community that wants to be informed. The FHPS website is a robust resource for district events, stories, and data, and I continue to work with the administration to bolster the way we acknowledge and address concerns brought forth by the public. Open communication is one of my most important areas for improvement, and I have already engaged the Board and Administration in 3 related areas: 1) A reassessment of live-streaming with an attempt to eliminate barriers, 2) Exploring how to make the public comment sessions at Board meetings more productive and conversational (recognizing there are many legal parameters that limit our ability to make changes), and 3) Revisiting how we address public concerns - for example, I would like to see us provide feedback and “progress reports” at subsequent meetings so the community knows their voices are heard and issues are being addressed.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #7

---

## 7. What are your views on open data and transparency of information? What kinds of school district information should be made public? (continued)

**NINEMEIER:** It is important to have transparency on what decisions are on the docket, how they will be made, who is involved, and why the specific decision was the best one given the information at hand. However, student, teacher and staff personal information should remain confidential.

**SHELDON:** I believe that all information that isn't personally sensitive information of staff, students, and support staff should be made available on the district's website. This includes but not limited to revenue, expenditures, and general budget of the district.

**SPRATKE:** Having never served on a school board or worked in school administration, this is hard for me to answer without knowing specific details about the data. That said, as a general rule I am in favor of transparency. I would hope that any school board I'm a part of would see the need for full transparency in any legally shareable information.

**VONCK:** Other than personnel files, all information is required by the Freedom of Information Act to be made available to the public. As a public institution charged with the care of our greatest gift, our children, I fully endorse this practice.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #8

---

## 8. What should be your school district's top spending priorities in their budget? Alternatively, what should not be prioritized in your district's budget?

**ABOUFADEL:** Top priorities should be determined through the lens of promoting excellent schools, which means sufficient funds for the curriculum, the facilities, and the staff. The challenge right now is keeping a balance between revenue (i.e., tax dollars) and spending, in an environment of economic instability and the pandemic.

**CALLAHAN:** Schools are a “people business”. Our first priority is making sure our staff are compensated so they can educate and care for our students. Forest Hills has made compensation and facilities improvements (bond expenditures rather than operating expenditures) in methodical and conservative fashion to impact students positively across the district attendance areas and a “student first” or “classroom first” criteria while also making sure the behind the scenes infrastructure is a priority even if the results of the work are not seen or celebrated unless you are walking on a roof or looking in a mechanical room.

**DONOVAN:** The top priority to budget is to fund the classroom and reduce class size. This should include the safety and security of our children while at school. As a residential rural school district, availability of busing should be at the top of the list as our roads were not designed for the regular cancellations of bus routes.

**JOHNS:** As a district we need to invest in the student as a whole learner. Strategic alignment of resources to our districts goals should be the assessment tool used to evaluate expenditures. The top three spending initiatives should be centered on excellence in student achievement, innovation, and mental health. In order to prepare our students to be 21st century learners we must focus on moving beyond just the traditional modes of teaching and learning and to incorporate technology and innovation into the daily modes of learning. In addition, students need to understand that their mental health is equally important to the district and to their individual success. We must invest in counseling as a means of educating students and families. Items that should not be prioritized are ones that are not in direct alignment with the districts strategic initiatives.

**MICHAUD:** I would respectfully suggest that my (or any candidate's) personal response to this question is irrelevant because it is not the job of an individual board member to decide the spending priorities for the district. The Board's job is to govern, set a vision, and hire/support a capable superintendent who is an expert in the arena of public education. So, respectfully, asking, “Where does a candidate think our money should be spent?” is perhaps not a very strong indicator of candidate strength. When Superintendent Behm or any of our Assistant Superintendents come to the Board and say, “I'd like to spend money here,” it then becomes my job to ask why, to understand the scenario, to ensure we have thought holistically about the spending, and to ensure there are not higher district spending priorities. I believe I perform those duties very well. On a broader scale, a main facet of Board service is recognizing the fact that we are not experts in every realm of public education. We do not NEED to be experts, but we need to ensure we have experts informing our decisions. The job of the Board of Education is to make sure we have these experts in our district (we do!) and to leverage them to make the best decisions for our kids.

**NINEMEIER:** Top priorities: Teacher and staff retention; technology; transportation; building and grounds refresh for safety and to keep up with other districts' facilities (including athletic facilities); support for student's individual needs; mental health support. I look forward to learning how the budget is set and what is specifically included.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #8

---

## 8. What should be your school district's top spending priorities in their budget? Alternatively, what should not be prioritized in your district's budget? (continued)

**SHELDON:** The district should thread the needle and ensure that the students have all the necessary tools that they require to learn, and ensure that faculty and staff have the wages and benefits that a highly thought of school district would be expected to have. FHPS bus drivers should not be susceptible to poaching by neighboring school districts because our drivers are underpaid and lack the benefits that other districts offer their drivers.

**SPRATKE:** I would prioritize the students getting the best education possible. I would look at items and ask if they can improve the student's ability to learn.

A specific issue I see, as a parent, in the last couple of years is transportation. My wife was on a committee to work with the transportation department and help them bridge the parent/administration gap. I would continue to support transportation and look for ways to make sure we have enough drivers.

Finally, I would like to try to understand what the wants and needs are for the district. What are the current projects? What are the long-term goals? Do we need better or different technology? How are our facilities? I would like to work on the principle of finding the biggest problem, fixing that, and moving on to the next major issue.

**VONCK:** Nearly 90% of the district budget covers personnel, which leaves little else open to consideration. That being said, our teachers are our front line in preparing our kids to graduate as independent adults prepared for the world they are entering. Our staff is our greatest asset, and we are fortunate our practices result in us hiring the best of the best.

As revenues are determined primarily by pupil count and state-dictated foundation allowance, we are proud that 78% of our budget is dedicated to instruction, and only 22% is dedicated to non-instructional expenses. These figures put us in the top 5% of the nearly 550 public school districts in the state. I aspire to continue this practice.

We are grateful the Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation supports our superintendent's vision and supplements our revenues to support students and deliver differentiated learning experiences.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #9

---

## 9. If you could have an impact on your school district's curriculum, what changes would you make? What, if anything, would you keep the same?

**ABOUFADEL:** I don't think it is the role of a newly-elected school board member to walk in and say, "Here are the curriculum changes that need to happen today". That kind of arrogance isn't good leadership. Rather, let's start with the premise that FHPS is one of the premiere school districts in West Michigan, it has a strong curriculum, and our kids are learning and are being prepared for college and other pursuits. We have excellent teachers in our schools. So, the question to ask is "How can we get even better?"

With my background in mathematics and science, I certainly would have an interest in our STEM curriculum in all of K-12. I would want to hear from principals and teachers about how, for instance, we are teaching arithmetic in elementary schools. What methods are being used, and which books? Those working directly with our kids would know best the answers to those questions.

I am a fan of the concepts of our specialized schools, such as the language immersion programs and the Goodwillie environmental school. I believe these programs, and all of our programs, should be accessed regularly so that we can make evidence-based decisions on how to improve them.

**CALLAHAN:** There are state standards set forth from the Michigan Department of Education that the Forest Hills curriculum team reviews and ensures are covered within the Forest Hills Public Schools courses, content and related experiences. Teachers, instructional coaches, and subject matter experts lay out the detailed scope and sequence of how the standards are addressed with activities, materials and experiences. What I would change? The pressure that teachers might feel to rush through so many standards in their allotted time. What would I keep the same? That our teachers continually engage in professional learning opportunities to hone their craft and work with fellow educators with innovative ways to engage our students in thorny problems and interesting challenges.

**DONOVAN:** My impact on the school district's curriculum would be to enhance the core education building blocks of Math, Science, Social Studies, Reading and Writing. As children advance through school, in addition to mastering the above, I would like to see all graduates from Forrest Hills Public Schools be able to speak a second language. Children in other countries can often speak three or four languages in addition to their native language. I believe this is imperative in our interconnected world. In addition, access to career and technical schools should be available to those who do not want to pursue a college education. Lastly, I would like to see all students graduate with knowledge of personal finance.

**JOHNS:** I would make students mental health a part of the core curriculum. Evidence has proven that pediatric mental health issues are at an all time high. As a district we need to recognize this as something we need to take a proactive approach on versus a reactive approach. Teaching content around mental health brings it to the forefront and will allow students to engage in learning how to recognize unhealthy thoughts and emotions and to build effective strategies for working through those issues. This strategy will only improve academic excellence.

What I would keep are the initiatives around parent engagement and investment in innovate curriculum such as Gone Boarding. The high schools have invited parents to come and talk about their professions and mentor high school students in the areas of leadership, career awareness, and self-confidence. I believe that engaging parents in this way builds trust in the value of (continued)

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #9

---

## 9. If you could have an impact on your school district's curriculum, what changes would you make? What, if anything, would you keep the same? (continued)

working together on educating our children. We need to continue to innovate and seek student feedback as they have often have great perspective into their own learning.

**MICHAUD:** As referenced in the previous question, I have full confidence that our Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum bring well-researched and necessary changes to the Board for consideration. That said, I have met with both of them this summer to educate myself on the state of FHPS academics and where they see opportunities moving forward. FHPS is innovating at a fast pace and I would like to see pilot programs that have been implemented successfully at specific schools expanded to all schools so more students can take advantage of the amazing opportunities! Programs like Gone Boarding, Project Next, and Project Lead the Way are all good examples. Overall, our FHPS curriculum is yielding results that rank in the top 2% of districts in Michigan, seeing more students in AP classes, dual enrolling in college programs, and graduating with 4.0+ GPAs than ever before, as well as innovating in STEM fields at every level. I hope to continue setting a vision for the Board that emphasizes forward thinking, high achievement, and ensuring learners at all levels have their academic needs met in the classroom.

**NINEMEIER:** I recognize that I am a finance/accounting person, not a curriculum expert. The Board hires a Superintendent who hires a Curriculum Director, who then sets the curriculum along with teachers and instructional coaches. I believe we have very qualified administrators and teachers that will provide expertise to set a curriculum for students that will guide them to academic success.

**SHELDON:** Overall, the district's curriculum is on par with that of other top performing districts throughout the state. However, there could be a few tweaks here and there. For instance, there's a lack of Honors or Challenge classes in the middle schools and AP classes for the high schools. Some parents have told me they feel like the district does not provide enough outlets for kids who are above average in intelligence but don't qualify for the gifted program. A parent I have talked with has a child who has missed out on the gifted program by a couple points both times they tested and in turn, they get bored in class and underperforms because they think the work is irrelevant and because it's easy and has no point.

**SPRATKE:** I believe the families of our school district have high expectations. Looking at testing, FHPS consistently tests at a high level. My goal would not be to come in and make large changes. I would seek information on curriculum and its implementation and how this serves the needs of children at Forest Hills Public Schools. Teachers are in classrooms every day and are trained to teach our children. I would value their opinion on curricular matters. What suggestions do they have for fine tuning and improvement? We must also ask how to evaluate those suggestions.

**VONCK:** As a public school district, we are obligated to teach and are assessed to show mastery of the Michigan State Standards. We are fortunate to have exceptional educators and administrators to ensure best practices are followed and student voice honored in the implementation of these standards. I appreciate the opportunity to review course offerings every year, as educators constantly strive to incorporate new learning opportunities and create project and problem based experiences for our students.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #10

---

## 10. What are your top priorities around special education in your district?

**ABOUFADEL:** A part of being a welcoming school district is to support those families whose children need special education opportunities. We must make sure that special education is sufficiently funded and staffed. We should hear what kids in these programs, as their parents, suggest for priorities.

**CALLAHAN:** That our students are afforded opportunities to achieve their individual potential regardless of their different abilities and they continue to be celebrated and supported by their peers. Further, that approximately 40 special education teachers/aides are provided the resources they need to serve our students.

**DONOVAN:** All students including those with Special Needs are entitled to a first class education. This community has a responsibility to provide for these children and to provide them with an education and experience gained in a public school on the same basis that every other student enjoys. As a member of the Board of Education I will support initiatives that ensure these students receive the education they are entitled to.

**JOHNS:** I had a son who went through the special education system. His teacher literally made the difference for him. He could have easily hated school and felt like a failure, but she made him feel like he belonged. Having said that, I felt like it was challenging to get him the services he needed. Even though I have a background in education, I was fairly unfamiliar with the process in Michigan for helping children receive special services. It felt like a 2 year uphill battle. My priorities would be to support parents and educators with more resources and options for support. I would like to see adequate and equitable funding for special education at all levels and improved access to services with key measurements in place to improve outcomes for these students.

**MICHAUD:** FHPS values every child and learner in our district and we place a high priority on our special education programs. This was evident during the pandemic (and continues today) when additional resources and dollars were diverted to these programs to minimize the negative impact of such tumultuous times. I hope and believe we will continue to innovate within these programs and maintain FHPS' reputation as a model district for special education.

**NINEMEIER:** Our district's Mission is to "...provide ALL learners with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to build meaningful and productive lives." Our Vision is "All learners achieving individual potential". To me, these are directives for our district to fully support special education, IEPs, 504 plans, English languages learners, etc. Supporting special education teachers is important, and it's also important to provide continuing education on special education topics to general education teachers.

**SHELDON:** First and foremost, there should be an emphasis on breaking down the stigma surrounding those that suffer from a learning disability. In addition, I would like to see that the Special Education department receive adequate funding so that all the students in that department receive the proper assistance. The parents that I have heard from concerning special education in the district varied on their opinions. Some parents have received excellent support (Collins elementary and Forest Hills Northern in particular), and some parents were extremely displeased. A clear problem seems to be lack organization at the district level – if there's any district organization at all. One thing is clear, that there are too many negative stories concerning special education in Forest Hills.

**SPRATKE:** Special Education is important to me. I have several friends who teach in special education, as well as family and friends whose children use, would benefit, and currently qualify (continued)



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #10

---

## 10. What are your top priorities around special education in your district? (continued)

for additional services. I would first need to get a better understanding of what the district currently has, and the limitations of why it isn't doing more. I also know that this is another place where we have programs in place that are not well communicated. From there I would look for ways to increase or improve the training we offer our counselors and teachers. Make sure they have the resources and time to focus on the children's needs.

**VONCK:** Again, our vision is all learners achieving individual potential. That includes every student in the district. I see great merit in coupling our Cognitively Impaired and Autism Spectrum Disorder populations with staff passionate about and proficient in addressing their students' needs. I also look forward to the new environment and learning opportunities our new transition center will make available to our students with the construction of our new administration building. And as we strive to educate the whole child, our special education staff goes to great lengths to provide rich experiences to our special education students outside of the classroom, including a thriving Special Olympics team and numerous peer support programs.





# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #10

---

## 11. What mental health supports, services, and classes do you think are needed in your district? What will you do as a school board member to support students' and staffs' mental and emotional health and well-being?

**ABOUFADEL:** One of FHPS' 21st Century Skills for the district is "resilience", which can apply to students and to staff. This is important, and I think one place that FHPS can help meet needs revolves around the use of social media. I believe the introduction of Facebook, Twitter, etc. more than a decade ago, while being great tools for several of our other 21st Century Skills (namely communication, collaboration, and global awareness), has also challenged our mental health, individually and as communities. To successfully navigate social media requires the ability to process information (both true and false) and emotion at a speed and volume that does not come naturally, requiring new learning and growth. Our schools can be a place for such learning, and to be successful at critical thinking (another 21st Century Skill), basic knowledge is needed, such as English, science, history, etc. I think we should be intentional with our students on the power of social media, including communicating that it is OK to turn it off sometimes.

Teachers have a challenging job that can affect their mental health. They are likely to need more support now (after COVID) than they did before, so their benefit package should include a full range of mental health support.

**CALLAHAN:** Forest Hills Public Schools has a continued commitment to mental health services as noted here. In recent years, the district hired mental health liaisons and has active relationships with local mental health professionals and organizations. The ongoing work of the AAA (Awareness Advocacy and Acceptance) parent group plays a significant role in community engagement and learning opportunities for parents and caregivers which is valuable. Recently, the administration has been reviewing the overall counseling/social work offerings within the district and scanning best practices to make sure these skilled resources are allocated to provide the best expertise for the contemporary needs of our students across all grades. My role as a board members will be to ask for recommendations from subject matter experts as to programs and resources required. I will support those that are sustainable (beyond potential one time funding sources) and can have broad impact across the student population again using the lens "what is best for kids?" when supporting plans/programs/resources for approval.

**DONOVAN:** This is an important question. One of the things we've learned with the advent of COVID is the need to support students and staffs mental health and well being. I will unequivocally support a partnership between the school, home and telemedicine services for students and staff. Covid created a new world order when it comes to telemedicine service. Why force staff and students to leave campus for hours when they can take a 30-60 minute telemedicine conference call? This type of thinking is what we need to provide better health and well-being for our students and staff.

**JOHNS:** The mental health crisis is pervasive in every district. Mental health education and awareness should be prevalent at each level within our district. We should invest not only in counseling services but also in professional development for educators who should all be trained in key mental health issues. Mental health initiatives should no longer be in reaction to problems that arise, but should be looked at with a proactive stance in supporting our students as whole learners. We need to prove that we value the mental health of our students as much as academic outcomes. As a board member I will support funding to increase education for both the teachers and students in areas of mental health.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #11

---

## 11. What mental health supports, services, and classes do you think are needed in your district? What will you do as a school board member to support students' and staffs' mental and emotional health/well-being? (continued)

**MICHAUD:** I believe educating a child in a public school should involve fostering the growth of the “whole” child. Data abundantly display the negative impacts on learning caused by poor mental health as well as the emotional, social, and even physical toll it takes on children of all ages. I am proud that FHPS takes care of the whole child. Study after study supports that allowing kids to express their mental health needs, and employing dedicated resources to attend to them, improves academic performance among a myriad of other benefits. Part of the FHPS Mission includes sending students out with the skills to lead meaningful and productive lives. I believe creating a culture of acceptance and awareness around mental and emotional health, and allowing kids to safely engage in these discussions as they grow, is foundational to this goal.

**NINEMEIER:** As two of our top priorities are safety and academic success, mental health plays a large role in both. In current state, FHPS has school counselors and social workers assigned to each school. The district also has mental health liaisons who both assist in the district mental health initiatives and provide direct assistance to students and families in need of support. In addition, there is an Awareness, Acceptance and Advocacy of Mental Health Parent Group (AAA) in the district, which provides further education and awareness surrounding the stigmas of mental health; in 2022 there was a speaking series for parents on different topics affecting youth today. As a School Board member, I would fully support the continuation of these important programs.

**SHELDON:** Mental Health is a priority of mine. Having lost a close family member to substance abuse, I know firsthand how crucial mental health support can be. As a school board member, I will make the mental well-being of the students and staff as my top priority. Thus far I feel that the district has an adequate coverage of social workers, counselors, and support from the mental health liaisons.

**SPRATKE:** I think we need to continue to work with our counselors and mental health liaisons to ensure they have the resources and training they need to support our children. Part of this would be to make sure we are properly allocating their time and tasks, as the more time they are working directly with our kids the better.

One of my biggest hopes is for better communication in general, and with mental health, I would like to see our district improve the promotion and awareness of the programs our counselors and liaisons already have in place.

**VONCK:** A primary goal of the district this year was to support learners not performing at their potential, as a result of the pandemic. I am excited about what we learn that can be added to the long list of supports already in place. We have grown from one to three mental health liaisons, and hiring is underway for mental health professionals, including social workers and professionals dedicated to multi-tiered systems of support for our students. Our board and district is incredibly proud of our AAA Group (Awareness, Acceptance and Advocacy of mental health), as they provide opportunities for our community to come together to learn and support our kids' emotional well-being. This group is one of many ways the district partners with parents to meet their children's needs. We have counselors available in all schools for all grade levels, and a staff dedicated to supporting that effort, despite significant shortages of counseling staff throughout the state.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #12

---

## 12. What is your vision for the future of education? Do you agree with the district's "21st Century Learning" plan? What would you add or change?

**ABOUFADEL:** My view of the future of education is one of evolution, not revolution. Our world is changing, due to technology innovation, demographic shifts, and climate destruction, and FHPS can react or we can prepare. I think it will be a combination of these, but my inclination is to start with what we do well and evolve, rather than to "burn the whole thing down and start over". What that may mean specifically for education is that first we have to keep a strong foundation of basic knowledge transferred to the next generation, but we also must pay attention to teaching methods and the environment in our schools, as the idea of a welcoming schools evolves.

The district has identified these 21st Century Skills: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, global awareness, innovation, and resilience. I hope my comments so far reflect that I embrace these concepts, and that they are connected. For instance, stable, trustworthy leadership looks for reasonable ways to innovate. It utilizes critical thinking skills, collaboration, and clear communication, all which can lower anxiety and promote resilience.

If I were to add anything, it would be to find a way to stress the importance of "knowledge" – at the end of the day, our kids must learn facts and ideas. The Skills list focuses a lot on the "how", but we have to continue to stress the "what". Not only should our kids be resilient, and collaborative, and thoughtful, but they should be knowledgeable, including global awareness.

**CALLAHAN:** This question is bigger than what I think I can answer midway through this survey. (If anyone has read this far, thank you!) What I will share instead of my vision is an update on what is in the works from the district. Forest Hills is starting a strategic planning process in August 2022 that will continue through fall into the winter with small group and some opportunity for community involvement. I am beyond excited about this! This strategic plan is going to give the community a deeper understanding of what you reference as the "21st century learning plan" which might support what Superintendent Behm often references when he discusses the 4000 hours of high school and the ways we can approach secondary school redesign for a high impact, engaging, rigorous and relevant experience. This is most definitely the work that will consume my hours of energy and enthusiasm for the district in the coming months. I cannot wait to see the output from the first groups in August and support the district in sharing this work as the fall and winter unfold.

**DONOVAN:** I agree with the districts 21st Century Learning Plan as long as it provides for the improvement of students. I would support change as necessary or when required to support the mission of the district.

**JOHNS:** I believe we are moving in the right direction towards 21st century learning. Programs like Gone Boarding and new electives being introduced at the middle and high school levels are evidence that we recognize that simple, traditional, book-only learning is a way of the past. We need to foster good communication skills, digital learning skills, problem solving and critical thinking. I would like to see classes that take real world problems and bring them into the classroom where students can come up with creative solutions and practice critical thinking skills in a supportive environment. Utilizing parents in the district who have experience across many sectors and having them work with students to build confidence is a great tool that the district is also working to improve.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #12

---

## 12. What is your vision for the future of education? Do you agree with the district's "21st Century Learning" plan? What would you add or change? (continued)

**MICHAUD:** I believe, with history and tradition as our guides, we MUST be focused on and help shape the future of education. Of course this means implementing new technologies and classroom resources, but it also means challenging the norm of "teachers talk and students listen." On that front, I think FHPS is excelling and leading in many ways: having students engage in their own evaluations, focusing on real-world problems of today, moving some instruction out of the classroom and into more open, group-work-friendly spaces, employing hands-on learning, having students teach other students, etc. The many construction updates occurring throughout the district all focus on this goal - creating new spaces and opportunities to engage students in 21st century learning. I think having too close an attachment to the traditional classroom and traditional learning styles limits the potential of both our teachers and students. I will continue to support the efforts in our district to innovate and advance toward the future of education!

**NINEMEIER:** We need to continually strengthen our public school system and progress with the world around us. Yes, I fully support the district's 21st Century Learning plan. It teaches students to work together, communicate effectively, and take ownership over their learning and the work they will produce. These are all qualities they will use to be successful wherever their future may take them.

**SHELDON:** Like any other profession education will continue to evolve – especially the methods in which to teach/learn. FHPS has done a good job at evolving the technology used to teach/learn. With broadband available throughout the district and computer access available to all students the district should start to transition away from expensive textbooks as much as possible.

**SPRATKE:** I think that education will continue to evolve. As more things become digital our students and staff need to be able to work with, and be comfortable using it. I would love to see our district embrace best-known practices for digital learning, and find ways to leverage technology with proven and established practices.

**VONCK:** I support our district's vision for education: All learners achieving individual potential. I embrace the amazing opportunities available to our students, opportunities that continue to develop: Goodwillie Environmental School, College and Career Readiness Counseling, Spanish and Chinese Immersion programs, our STEM program, Project NEXT, AP Capstone, Project Lead the Way, and new this fall, our Gone Boarding expanded block program, to name a few. I regularly encounter people in other districts and other states who repeatedly question if we are a public school district when listing what we offer our students.

The district launched a Business Advisory Council years ago, and our corporate neighbors willingly participate to this day. This group convened to support the district's students and vision and recently acknowledged a need to develop 21st century skills in our graduates: communication, collaboration, creative problem solving. We are excited to embrace this directive and offer the programs listed above to instill those skills in our students.

Our construction projects are in line with research on best practices supporting student needs. Forest Hills is creating 21st century learners and embraces the opportunity for every student to discover their passions and develop their talents as a means of living meaningful, productive lives.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #13

---

## 13. What do you believe the district has done well over the past five years? Where are the strongest areas for improvement?

**ABOUFADEL:** We have a fantastic list of Guiding Principles of FHPS – Caring, Collaboration, Open Communication, Diversity and Inclusiveness, High Expectations, Learning, Respect, and Trust – and I believe the school district has done well to live up to these principles. This has led to the kinds of successes that are described on the “Top Reasons to Choose Forest Hills Public Schools” page, including a record number of students earning National Merit recognition, a wide range of exploratory courses for students to choose from, an excellent cadre of teachers and professional staff to help our students thrive, and an overall reputation for academic excellence. I think highly of our language immersion programs, our positive relationship with the community, and our excellent competitive teams.

Because I believe it is important to be evidence-driven, I would be interested in having a parent and student satisfaction measure implemented throughout the district. This is an opportunity to measure both pride and concerns about the district, in terms of bigger strategy questions and specific, day-to-day matters. We should have transparent assessment protocols.

**CALLAHAN:** I often think back to the campaign the Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation ran “Destination Innovation” some years back that launched big and small grants to teachers which allowed them to really try, iterate, explore, implement new ideas/tools/technology to push forward their teaching and hone their craft to engage and inspire students. The output of these grants has sometimes morphed into a district wide effort for professional learning or material purchases or perhaps the seed for an innovative class that has grown in popularity around things like robotics etc. Encouraging teachers to try and share ideas creates a culture of innovation without abandoning high expectations. At the same time our teachers have been collaborating and implementing new ideas, the district continues to achieve high marks on what are note worthy “traditional” marks of GPAs, AP exams, graduation rates, academic achievement and recognition, and not to be missed artistic and athletic performances.

The biggest area for improvement is a coherent and consistent communications mechanism to share the excellence of what is happening not just to celebrate the work but to encourage students and staff to continue this work and have the community support it.

**DONOVAN:** Over the last five years I feel the district has embraced growth throughout the district and continues to bring the best talent to the classroom for our children. Improvement can be had by creating more equity throughout Central, Northern and Eastern campuses. The three regions are very different when it comes to buildings, spaces, technology, equipment, etc.

**JOHNS:** I believe that the district has invested in STEM and has recognized the need for broadening the scope of academics at the High School Level. I think they have investigated other districts who have had success and are investing in curriculum and structures that are well suited for collaboration amongst peer groups. I think they have invested in cutting edge learning opportunities, and trying to care for the student as a whole. I think some of the areas for improvement are in transparency, mental health, and staff retainment. I think there is an opportunity to investigate ways to become more transparent between the board and the parents. I think the board has a vested interest in eliminating divisiveness. We need to come up with a compromise that keeps parents well informed. I think effective communication eliminates many problems. I think we as a district need to (continued)



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #13

---

## 13. What do you believe the district has done well over the past five years? Where are the strongest areas for improvement? (continued)

continue to invest in mental health initiatives that continue to focus on the whole child and providing funding that supports this initiative. The last area for improvement is on retaining staff. I have witnessed staff turn over even mid year which causes challenges for the learner. I would like to see us engage teachers to figure out how we can position our school as one that is highly sought after by current and future educators.

**MICHAUD:** Nothing impacted education more in the last 5 years than the pandemic. Data now shows and supports that learning loss occurred at all levels of education and in essentially every district in the state. However, when compared to like schools across Michigan, FHPS showed the LEAST amount of objectively-measurable learning loss, which is quite an accomplishment and a credit to our Superintendent and administration. I also think they deserve to be applauded for holding child safety as their number one priority and acting quickly during turbulent times to best meet the needs of our students. I would like to see us communicate more effectively and will continue to foster a culture that empowers community members with information. Superintendent Behm's mid-summer update regarding transportation and what to expect as the school year approaches is a good example of this communication-heavy culture I am working to expand.

**NINEMEIER:** Successes: Rolling out the Global Learning Initiative (GLI) - excited to see that grow. Rolling out the 21st Century Learning plan. Listening to experts on keeping kids safe during the pandemic. Improvements: More timely and robust communication to teachers, staff, parents and students. Working on faculty, staff and transportation provider retention.

**SHELDON:** The district has a very good reputation for preparing students for college and beyond. The strongest area for improvement would be faster response time to emerging crisis. The district was slow to react to issues raised by parents concerning books containing the N-word, Covid with masking, and shortages in bus drivers. In the future the district needs to act quicker to respond to these important issues.

**SPRATKE:** I liked that Forest Hills had implemented a no cell phone policy. Having kids, I feel that phones and technology are great tools for learning, but can also be distractions. I would like to understand why we went away from that and discuss going back to it.

I would like to see improvement in understanding our teachers' needs, and what aspects of their job are difficult for them. I can share ideas of what I see or feel, but I'm not in the classroom every day, and I would like to try to focus on what our teachers and students need to succeed.

**VONCK:** Forest Hills continues to be a top district in the state...academically, artistically, athletically. We recently graduated the highest percentage of students in the history of the district, and our elementary students' math and reading scores fall in the top 1.7% in the state. We were proud to honor numerous state champions this past year, and we are incredibly proud of our students' other non-academic accomplishments. We continue to offer new learning opportunities and build on established programs. One example is the opportunity for Chinese Immersion students to enroll in college courses while in high school and earn a Chinese language minor when graduating from high school. Another is the opportunity to enroll in Gone Boarding as a block program incorporating Business and English skills.

Where do we improve? Our vision speaks for itself: ALL learners achieve individual potential. (continued)



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #13

---

## 13. What do you believe the district has done well over the past five years? Where are the strongest areas for improvement? (continued)

We respond to and need to continue to respond to the needs of our students through new learning opportunities. New opportunities will be launched this fall, and we need to continue to find ways for all learners to achieve their potential.

Although academics are touted as a district's primary objectives, we recognize the whole student. I support the district's efforts to put emotional health supports in place and offer numerous non-academic opportunities for students to discover their passions and develop their talents while engaged in rigorous academic activity.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #14

---

## 14. What programs will you work to build and/or expand that support career readiness and vocational programs?

**ABOUFADEL:** My grandfather was a carpenter who helped build naval boats in New York City during World War II. Appreciating his work, we must elevate these programs and our celebration of them. It is important to have well-trained professionals in vocational areas. We can also strengthen partnerships with community colleges and other organizations that support career readiness.

**CALLAHAN:** As a board member, I will not be the one building or expanding these programs. (But this is a passion of mine!) I am eager to learn more about what is next with Project Lead the Way at FHE, more great work from Brian Johnson at FHN as it relates to all things business and personal finance, Jayme Buchanan's efforts to support DECA and the career exploration that is cutting across all counselors. Couple those few examples with Jon Gregory's engagement around secondary school redesign and there will be quite a lot of exciting ideas I am eager to witness.

**DONOVAN:** I support access for all children to career readiness and vocational programs. A favorite class as a child was wood shop. I learned to make practical things like a coffee table. I was able to make and build a coffee table which my parents continue to use it to this day. Career readiness, vocational classes and classes like personal finance are great for those who are college bound and trade bound. These classes need to be brought back to our schools although sometimes they may not appear to be economically feasible. I support these programs and will work to ensure they remain funded.

**JOHNS:** We live in the best community in Michigan. We have thousands of parents who are actively involved and invested into the education of their children. I think there are ways to further engage parents by bringing them into the classroom and having them engage in real world experiences with the students. I think this can go beyond just an assembly with a few minutes of engagement. Inviting more parents in to engage with high school students to broaden their horizon of opportunities is something I am passionate about. I remember thinking after I graduated college that I could never be anything besides a teacher because that is what my degree said. I think that mind set cripples high school student into thinking that whatever they study is what they have to do for the rest of their life. Showing students the evolution of a career path and steps that are good to take and ones to avoid are all healthy ways to engage our high school students and expand career readiness.

**MICHAUD:** Forest Hills Eastern Middle and High schools are ramping up efforts to expose students to careers and vocations. Led by one of our fabulous counselors, the program is being embedded into the regular school calendar so students are constantly learning about opportunities after high school. Dozens of community members are being tapped to speak to small groups about their professions, and the program helps match student interests with real-world professionals for shadowing opportunities. The number of jobs and vocations these students will be exposed to before graduation is astounding! I fully support programs like this that highlight the many modern, in-demand careers that exist through both college and non-college tracts. I am looking forward to hearing student and staff feedback on the program this year with hopes it can be quickly expanded across the district!

**NINEMEIER:** These programs are built and expanded by the Curriculum team, which is hired by the Superintendent. I support the current programs available as great options, including the language immersion programs, Flex Academy, STEM Academy, and more. The 21st Century Learning plan direction will continue to produce programs that ready our students for the world after graduation. It is important to provide adequate resources to all teachers no matter which path they are leading in our schools.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #14

---

## 14. What programs will you work to build and/or expand that support career readiness and vocational programs? (continued)

**SHELDON:** Publicizing opportunities and partnering with Kent Career Tech Center in a more meaningful way. Utilizing high school counselors & potentially expand counselors available to students to help them prepare for life after high school. There are so many students & the counselors have a large workload. Model what FHE is doing with bringing in community members to share what they do for work to the students, including people in the trades. Make field trips available to see the trades in action. Expand on the STEM Academy. Make sure students at the Flex Academy get the same career readiness opportunities that other students get (if they don't already).

**SPRATKE:** I feel our district should continue to find ways to support our students in ways that prepare them for their lives and careers after school. This is one aspect where I would like to understand what skills are lacking, and work towards filling those gaps.

The Kent ISD vocational program has been very successful. Knowing that every student has the option to apply for this program. I would like to make sure that all of our students are aware of this program, and we find greater access so that students are not denied this opportunity.

**VONCK:** Our gifted staff has launched and continues to launch numerous programs that prepare our students for post-secondary life. The College and Career Readiness program at FHE was the Instructional Highlight at our April board meeting. I look forward to seeing this program in our other schools. I had the privilege of attending FHN's STEM/Project NEXT meeting with Consumers Energy and In the Image where students were charged with helping In the Image reduce its operating costs. Not only did students' recommendations offer impressive paybacks, but the students also recognized In the Image's interest in environmental impact and calculated the carbon footprint of their recommendation: communication, collaboration, and creative problem solving...21st century skills in action. Our FHC biology students benefit from a partnership with Van Andel Institute in capstone and independent study projects. Our board has attended student poster presentations in a symposium setting and witnessed fascinating research and discovery and 21st century skills. We also have a thriving relationship with KISD, where many Forest Hills students attend the Kent Career Tech Center. A representative for the West Michigan Building Trades Council addressed the board at a recent meeting. We connected him with our Academic Booster Groups and Instruction department in hopes of a partnership that will expose our kids to more future career opportunities.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #15

---

## 15. What role do you think standardized tests should play in your school district?

**ABOUFADEL:** It is important for us to be able to evaluate our schools using objective measures. While there are questions about whether standardized tests are sufficiently objective or valid, they are a tool to understand how we are doing and where we need to improve. This is true at the individual level, the building level, and the district level. We also need to understand that standardized tests are just one way of measuring learning and do not replace the role of the teachers who spend time with our students daily.

An interesting twist on this topic are recent moves by some universities to become “test-optional”, as they signal that they are not as enamored with standardized tests as they used to be, and they anticipate recruiting students in more holistic ways. We will have to monitor the situation, as any of our kids who want to go to college should be sufficiently prepared in order to be accepted for admission.

**CALLAHAN:** The district will continue to incorporate required standardized tests as required by the State of Michigan. Making data informed decisions requires the use of myriad data points with standardized tests as a data point. Standardized tests alone are not the end all and be all and should be just one component that is evaluated in concert with other formative and summative assessment measures to get a robust and informed understanding of individual and cohort success.

**DONOVAN:** There is nothing standard about a standardized test. However, we must find a way to measure our students performance or we'll never grow as a community. As a board member I will use the best metric to measure performance and allow that data to guide decisions on how we improve.

**JOHNS:** Standardized tests play a role in demonstrating the district's preparation of students across specific content areas and allow for comparisons between districts. They can help give us accountability for our curriculum and programs as well as measure student achievement from year to year. However, using standardized tests as a singular measure of achievement is not helpful. We should use them in conjunction with an array of other measurement tools.

**MICHAUD:** My opinions around educating our kids are derived from evidence rather than my personal feelings. Standardized tests have a role, and of course there must be an objective way to compare systems and identify areas for improvement. However, data clearly shows that future success is NOT as dependent on standardized test scores as was once believed, and that kids learn and demonstrate their knowledge in many different ways. Consider the M-STEP assessment, which our students take annually from 3rd to 8th grade. Those scores do matter and it is important that we prepare students for the tests. Our recent data tells an interesting and intentional story: Our 3rd grade scores trail some neighboring districts, but by 8th grade our scores end up exceeding those same districts. The focus in the elementary buildings is not “teaching to the test,” but instead instilling good problem solving skills and creating good learners. This wholistic approach that initially de-emphasizes the standardized test scores actually ends up producing better marks on them in the end! I couldn't agree more with this approach to education, especially at the elementary level, and I support the current position of our Superintendent and administration when it comes to standardized testing.

**NINEMEIER:** Standardized tests can be a useful tool to measure student growth, however, it is important to take into consideration other academic measures and extracurricular activities when evaluating an individual student's success.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #15

---

## 15. What role do you think standardized tests should play in your school district? (continued)

**SHELDON:** Unfortunately, for the time being, standardized testing is a necessary evil. It would be very difficult to create a mechanism that could effectively tell how well students are compared to their fellow students throughout the district and state. I firmly believe that standardized testing enables the killing of student's creativity and doesn't give the individual student the attention they need to excel. I would welcome a change to how the district and state evaluates its students, I just do not see that happening anytime soon.

**SPRATKE:** I think standardized tests are a great way to get a general feel for where a student or district is at academically. I also know that a standardized test is difficult for some students. I don't like the idea of our teachers teaching to a test, as it could take away from spontaneous, or hands-on learning. I would like to see a balance of making sure our kids learn what is needed to test well, but also take the time to explore aspects of a subject that might not be part of the test.

**VONCK:** The reality is the M-STEP is Michigan's federally mandated standardized test that ultimately leads to funding and staff evaluations. Assessments are key to determining mastery. Years ago, our board was invited to professional development that touted formative assessment in addition to summative assessment, and the district consequently crafted a healthy plan with respected assessments to measure our students' academic growth. The NWEA and MAP assessments have served as valued tools in gauging our student's mastery of content and play a key role in directing our students' learning. Such tests can be administered as part of the learning process and detract very little from the educational experience.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #16

---

## 16. What outputs are you most concerned with when measuring district success?

**ABOUFADEL:** There are several standard metrics to monitor closely: graduation rates, retention rates (how many students return from one year to the next), standardized test scores, college admission rates, applications for schools-of-choice, demographic trends, and budget trends come to mind. There should be some measures of student and parent satisfaction, too.

**CALLAHAN:** (did not respond)

**DONOVAN:** The biggest output to measure when looking at district success revolves around graduation rates. Followed by grade point averages. From there I believe we should measure college bound students and their graduation rates, and, not college bound students and their success post graduation. Where do students end up 5 or 10 years after graduation is the ultimate measure of the district's success.

**JOHNS:** I am most concerned with the outputs of student achievement in terms of grades, mental health, and college readiness. As a district we need to always evaluate performance and look for ways to improve student outcomes for successful transition out of High School and into college and trade schools. We should utilize standardized tests as one form of output but use that in conjunction data collected through conversations and surveys with students to analyze their own feelings of preparedness for the next phase of life.

**MICHAUD:** I would like to look at how our kids do when they leave our district. Are they living meaningful and productive lives? Do they have ALL the skills to lead productive lives? Are they prepared to independently find success in the world after they graduate? This would differ from "college readiness" because we know that not every meaningful and successful path includes college after high school. To my knowledge this particular metric does not exist, but these are the questions I think we should be asking ourselves to measure our success as a public school system.

**NINEMEIER:** Graduation rates, truancy rates (proactive truancy support is important), suspension or violence rates, teacher and staff retention rates, college or career readiness.

**SHELDON:** There are several ways to measure success such as graduation/dropout rate, college admittance, and awards given for academic reasons. For me, graduation rate and college admittance would be the two most important measures.

**SPRATKE:** For me, the output is that a student and family get what they need out of the district. For many families, it's that their student is ready for college, and can get accepted to the college of their dreams. For some students that are not interested in a college track, it might be more vocational work. In short, our district should be trying to find ways that each student walks away with an education that has prepared them for their vision of life after Forest Hills. In addition, I strongly believe that we need to find ways to measure how safe our students feel physically and emotionally.

**VONCK:** Schools have always been synonymous with academia, and statistically, our students top the charts. More importantly, our goal is to graduate happy, healthy, independent adults who have developed talents that support their discovered passions. Recent culture and climate (continued)



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #16

---

## 16. What outputs are you most concerned with when measuring district success? (continued)

surveys show students are engaged, and parents are pleased. Examples from one high school include:

Students: My teachers want me to do the best I can/encourage me to do so.

- 91% of students agree (26% increase from 2018 survey)

Parents: The variety of courses and activities at this school keep my child engaged in learning

- 90% agree (7% increase from 2018 survey)

Staff: Staff at this school create a sense of belonging among all students

- 94% agree

These surveys are regularly distributed to stakeholders. Feedback from all stakeholders is critical in gauging district success.

We also need to ensure efficient operation in the education of our students. Our audits have been clean and received commendation every year for the last 23 years, and we maintain a healthy fund balance.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #17

---

## 17. How do you think your school district should make schools a safe place for students and staff?

**ABOUFADEL:** A conversation would start with current emergency plans for our schools for the case of an active shooter or some other threat to students and staff. Those plans should be reviewed, in cooperation with local police authorities, and a mock drill should be conducted. (Something more elaborate than the annual safety drills.) Actions like these will build confidence in the community about our response plans.

Let us pray that FHPS is never the site for an active shooter. When these terrible tragedies have occurred elsewhere in the country, the response from some politicians has been horrifying. I do not support arming our teachers with weapons, nor requiring gun education courses for our kids. Let's keep guns out of schools, except when they are in the hands of trained law enforcement officers.

**CALLAHAN:** Forest Hills Public Schools invests in the people and the physical resources to keep students safe. As discussed earlier, relationships among peers and trusted adults is a key component of a safe place for students and staff. From the physical aspect, Forest Hills works with subject matter experts and local law enforcement to ensure adequate training and procedures are in place in the event of a natural disaster, security breach, or other safety concern. The board expects rigorous, regular and robust review and planning for contingencies. I anticipate additional forums for parents in 2022 that will inform parents on measures (that can be shared without actually compromising safety) taken to mitigate risk..

**DONOVAN:** Our schools should not be turned into prisons, however, our schools must be free of drugs, alcohol, vaping and violence. The solution falls within our community and I feel we need to have a conversation and create a vision around this topic.

**JOHNS:** Our district needs to focus on communication. Students and families feel safe when they feel well informed about concerns and how they are addressed. Families want to know that the district shares in their concerns and are addressing them in a timely manner. Improving the way parents and students communicate with the district on safety concerns and responses will give families as sense of security.

**MICHAUD:** School safety is paramount and I am proud to oversee a Superintendent and district that places nothing above student safety. I also believe that school safety extends beyond physical safety and am equally proud to serve a district that recognizes and promotes emotional safety for all students. Across the United States in 2021 there were 34 school shootings (including one in Michigan) and over 2,800 reported youth suicides - both staggering and horrifying numbers. I firmly believe in dedicating resources and consulting with/hiring experts in the areas of both physical and emotional safety. I am proud to serve on the school board for a district whose Superintendent places such emphasis on both aspects of student safety.

**NINEMEIER:** Continuing mental health support. Cultivating a culture of awareness and proactively addressing bullying, violence, etc. Listening to teacher and staff ideas on safety in their own schools. Refreshing buildings and grounds according to the newest ideas in creating safe schools.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #17

---

## 17. How do you think your school district should make schools a safe place for students and staff? (continued)

**SHELDON:** There is no place for hate in the FHPS district. All students regardless of identity need to feel safe and welcomed on campus. All bullying (in person and virtual) needs to be quickly addressed and shut down immediately and all culprits punished with the maximum penalty allowed. Context matter so the school staff can have discretion. Teachers/staff need to know that they are supported as well, regardless of personal identity.

**SPRATKE:** I believe the millage passed a couple of years ago is a good thing. We have updated our schools with modern safety measures. Moving forward, we need to be realistic about how the world has changed in the past couple of decades, and make sure that we balance the safety of our kids with still making it a comfortable safe place that does not feel intimidating.

**VONCK:** Our generous taxpayers have allowed Forest Hills to create safe structures, but to truly make schools safe, we need to educate and empower all in our community to support each other. As we add emotional health professionals to our staff, and provide professional learning to our existing staff, we strive to create awareness of situations and behaviors that may warrant support and strategies to provide that support to ensure all in our school community are and feel safe.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #18

---

## 18. What do you think are the biggest challenges currently at FHPS? In the next 5-10 years?

**ABOUFADEL:** Here are three things to worry about:

**Growth and stagnation:** In 2010, they closed my high school in Fort Wayne, due to declining enrollments. A few years ago, they opened the school for a day for alumni to walk through, and it was a sad experience. Then, they tore the building down. What happened? Fort Wayne's economy stagnated in the early 2000's, many people moved away, and those that stayed chose to have fewer children. The 2008-09 "Great Recession" contributed. In many ways, the state of Michigan has been dealing with similar trends for the past two decades, and we can see the effects on enrollments at universities such as Central Michigan. Thankfully, the Forest Hills area has been vibrant and growing, and that has helped us maintain our excellent school system which in turn continues to attract new residents to the district. However, that dynamic can change, and it is a two-way street: if in the future there is a perceived decline in our schools, that could lead to a real decline in the community.

**Politicization of schools:** We need to continue to value civility, common ground, and the truth. Stirring up outrage about things that are not true is dishonest and divisive. I believe the parents and other residents of the school district stand largely united about the continued strength of Forest Hills.

**Taking our eyes off our mission:** We have a wonderful mission statement: "In partnership with our community, Forest Hills Public Schools will provide all learners with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to build meaningful and productive lives." But we need to be careful that we continue to devote our time, talent, and treasure "to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences". While we can't ignore our changing world, if our kids aren't learning, then we are failing.

**CALLAHAN:** One might expect me to reference political agendas, pandemic related conversations or some other topic of the news cycle. That is not, in fact, the biggest challenge I continue to empathize with urgent matters and support families who have individual concerns that need to be addressed for their family situation but are not district wide in nature. Our guiding principles have been in place for decades and provide an avenue and decision lens for staff, administrators and board members to approach the events of the day that emerge.

**Cross cutting challenges related to our most important stakeholders:**

**Students:** Our biggest challenge is and will continue to be anything related to students. Every day teachers and staff need to come up with relevant and rigorous learning experiences that prepare our kids for life beyond high school. Alongside this, there are myriad of factors from social pressures to economic realities facing a family or uncertainty about "what they want to be when they grow up" and the purpose of school. How to make school rigorous and relevant? That work will never be done because teachers ARE students and will always want to improve. Challenge accepted!

**Staff:** The dwindling teacher pipeline and an aging teacher population coupled with staffing pressure felt across all industries is a challenge that has been looming and is intensifying in magnitude.

**DONOVAN:** The biggest challenge we face in Forest Hills Public Schools is growth. Our district is successful and popular. As our older population moves out or down sizes, younger families are moving in daily. Finding teachers, land for new schools and bus drivers are challenges that will continue.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #18

---

## 18. What do you think are the biggest challenges currently at FHPS? In the next 5-10 years? (continued)

**JOHNS:** Keeping a focus on cutting edge education and the funding required to maximize the training and technology needed to meet this goal is the biggest challenge I see facing FHPS. We need to seek creative ways to fund initiatives and seek community collaboration in order to overcome this.

**MICHAUD:** I think the biggest challenge in FHPS right now is one of trust. Perhaps this has been sown unnecessarily by a few loud voices with strong opinions, but I would also guess most of us in the district can think of an instance where we've said, "Oh, I didn't even know that," or, "I wish we would get an update on..." or, "What is the district doing about..." The pandemic very abruptly shifted our modes of communication to electronic/virtual, and I think it has become an expectation that everything should continue to deliver information in that way. I don't disagree, and I hope to keep FHPS progressing into the modern 21st century. I also acknowledge that there are pre-pandemic laws and regulations around public schools that make dramatic changes a bit more challenging, and that just because another district is doing something doesn't make it compliant or (in some cases) legal under those current laws. Until we can address them, I think the community will continue to ask, "Why aren't you telling us everything?", even when the work, message, and intentions from the district are noble. This is a major focus area of mine and one I think I am well-equipped to see through, as a younger parent in the district. I hope to modernize our communication system so we can empower a community that wants to know more!

**NINEMEIER:** Our biggest challenge currently is building community relationships, between the administration, the faculty and the community (parents, caregivers, students). Open and honest communication and collaboration can go a long way in aiding that effort.

The rapid population growth we are seeing in our area could be a big challenge in our district over then next decade, and we need to start planning for what that will look like now.

**SHELDON:** The current challenges are COVID (still), driver shortages, and unfortunately the encroaching politics of our time (teaching of diversity etc). In the next 5-10 years the most pressing concerns will be staying on the cutting edge of the evolution of teaching/learning technology and techniques and keeping politics out of school issues.

**SPRATKE:** I think communication is a major issue at FHPS that, if improved, addresses other areas. As an example, busing has been a problem the last couple of years. FHPS has hired new drivers, they have had a task force to get parent input, and are working on optimized bus routes. With this, we still had short notice to sign up and sign up was required. I feel the communication of the reasons behind this, and the overall process of how it works, is lacking.

Another example is that we have multiple national topics causing a divide in the district. I would hope that we can find ways to listen to all points of view and start working together, rather than against each other.

**VONCK:** As heard by our board and vocalized by our superintendent when appointing a new trustee in March, the pandemic and other recent events have created isolation and division on a national scale, and Forest Hills is no exception. We need to come together as a community to educate our children. Through continued robust communication, celebrating our successes, and more means of bringing our community together, we will continue to strive to earn and protect the trust our community has in us.



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #19

---

## 19. What do you think are the biggest successes at FHPS?

**ABOUFADEL:** The reputation for academic excellence is well-deserved. The variety of opportunities available is important, too, such as languages, music, STEM/STEAM, and environmental studies. In addition, FHPS has excellent facilities and competitive teams.

**CALLAHAN:** (did not respond)

**DONOVAN:** The biggest successes at FHPS are our students, parents and teachers. They've created a reputation of success that has made us one of the most outstanding school districts in Michigan. Hence the growth challenge.

**JOHNS:** We have positive role models in our teachers and staff. Even during challenging times the communication from the schools focused on the positive things going right and not on all of the challenges. We have active and passionate parents who are eager to be involved with the district and with their students. We live in a thriving community that actively supports one another. The administration is focused on strategic planning that will position our students for the best academic outcomes. The combination of all of these things has brought success to our district so far.

**MICHAUD:** As a frontline hospital worker who saw a lot of COVID-related illness and death, I think the way FHPS kept our children and staff safe during the unprecedented, ever-changing pandemic - and how we have emerged on the other side stronger than ever - was a huge success! There are also many newer programs inside the district that have seen resounding success and are actively being expanded, including Project Next, Project Lead the Way, Gone Boarding, and many others. FHPS also continues to find success academically, including ranking in the top 2% in Michigan in academic success. The 2021-2022 school year saw the highest graduation rate (98%) in the last 15 years, and we have record numbers of students taking AP classes and dual-enrolling in colleges, etc. There is MUCH to brag about in Forest Hills! I also believe our ongoing partnership with the Forest Hills Foundation and the FHPS community at large is a huge success! The collaboration and shared vision among many stakeholders in Forest Hills makes so many things possible for our students and staff.

**NINEMEIER:** Strong academic performance, one of the top schools in the state and country. Investment in student programs that are giving the students ownership over their learning. The work being done to provide an inclusive environment, both socially and academically.

**SHELDON:** The biggest successes at FHPS would be the high rate of graduation and ensuing college admittance.

**SPRATKE:** I think success can be measured in that our schools do rank highly in the state when you look at test scores, graduation rate, and post secondary preparation. In the end, I feel the success of FHPS is what our students do after they leave. Are we preparing our students for life after high school and the next stages of their life? And as they progress through these stages, do they have the foundation and ability to continue independently learning?

I also feel that FHPS has done a good job of making programs available outside of the classroom. Be it sports, music, robotics, the Odyssey of the Mind, etc, it seems

like FHPS has embraced the need for diverse offerings that help our children be better students and well-rounded people.

# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #19

---

## 19. What do you think are the biggest successes at FHPS? (continued)

**VONCK:** Our kids! Where they go and what they do continues to amaze me. Our graduates earn millions of dollars in scholarships every year. One student conducted research that was published in a medical journal the summer after he graduated from high school. A student contacted me for support when her college asked her to launch a substance abuse prevention discussion group at her college after her experience teaching Project Charlie. Students have engaged in newsworthy fundraising campaigns to support important causes. Forest Hills athletes have landed on college and professional teams. Our artists and musicians have earned state and national recognition. We have so much to be proud of in Forest Hills!



# SUPPORT FHPS CANDIDATE SURVEY RESPONSES #20

---

## 20. What are 1-2 things you think FHPS could do to enhance the Support, Safety and/or Success of all students?

**ABOUFADEL:** Summarizing a few of my earlier responses, decisions on how to improve Support, Safety, and/or Success should be evidence-based, so there may be a need to improve our efforts to collect data and assess issues. I would like to see an intentional focus on the use and mis-use of social media, with an eye towards its effects on learning and mental health. Also, FHPS should review and update all current emergency plans related to safety.

**CALLAHAN:** (did not respond)

**DONOVAN:** Students cannot succeed unless they first and foremost feel safe. Students must have confidence in their teachers and counselors to provide for their health and wellbeing. Ultimately those who are in charge of their education must have the knowledge and confidence in the students ability to succeed. Additionally, the vaping, drug and alcohol problem that exists in our schools must be addressed. This is a problem that's been impacting schools for decades. Social media and the legalization of marijuana has only compounded the problem. As a community, we must come together to solve this issue to support our students, give them a safe learning environment and to ensure their success.

**JOHNS:** We need to openly engage students with concerns they have and encourage dialog between parents and administration. We should add forms of communication that allow for anonymous tips to come in that will encourage concerned students to come forward. Many students are concerned about the ramifications from peers if they come forward with concerns. Figuring out how to create these open channels of communication is one simple method to help make students feel safe.

**MICHAUD:** (did not respond)

**NINEMEIER:** Be progressive and adaptable to ensure our students are prepared for an ever changing tomorrow.

**SHELDON:** FHPS has a healthy fund balance; they need to spend additional funds on expanding student mental health services and educating the community on DE&I. When students have the resources to make them feel safe and secure; and cared for in ways they can't get at home (mental health) it will create more engaging student interactions and higher performance. More resources for parents navigating an ever-changing environment - parents aren't raising their kids in the same way we grew up. Internet, school gun violence, etc. Funding to enhance student safety; physical safety of course, but also training on see something say something.

**SPRATKE:** I think support is a big thing to work on, and it is another thing that a focus on communication could help. Finding ways to support our students and staff with resources both in our schools and in the community. Make sure those resources are available. Support by listening to our students and staff to find the most difficult challenges children face throughout the school day and look for ways to improve them. We won't be able to fix every problem tomorrow, but if we start looking at the biggest, most common issues, and ways to improve them, I'm confident we would make quick gains in everyone's experience in the district.

**VONCK:** My answers to the previous questions answer this question. We are launching new programs, as referenced above, and will continue to investigate opportunities to provide differentiated learning experiences and develop 21st century skills. We are hiring new staff and educating all staff on best practices for safe learning environments. When kids feel a sense of belonging and are inspired by what they experience at school, they are committed to playing an active role in keeping it safe for everyone.