

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**DAVID ABATE**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I feel qualified to serve as a Board of Education member because I've been in the field of education since 1992. A lawyer does not seek policy on law from an architect. And a doctor does not seek medical advice from a builder. Policy surrounding and involving education should be made by individuals cognitively immersed within education. I have a BS in Marketing, a minor in Management and the equivalent of a sixth year degree in education and education leadership. I am Vice-President of the Hamden Education Association and have experience working with Superintendents, administration, board policy and practice. I am also a teacher. I have taught the full secondary spectrum from Functional Lifeskill Programs to Talented and Gifted. In addition to teaching I facilitate curriculum and methods courses as an adjunct professor at Sacred Heart University and Quinnipiac University and have developed education courses at the secondary and college level. All of this experience allows me to be very current on issues, concerns, and initiatives regarding education from the state level to local districts. This experience has also exposed me to public, administrative, teacher concerns and solutions. Over my career in education I have served on numerous committees involving education and reform. I have developed and presented workshops on assessment and curriculum and have even presented at national education conferences regarding assessment.

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

My top priorities would be to continue to support and adopt policies that enhance student learning at school and home. To work closely with the Superintendent, administration, the community and other members of the board to continue to make North Haven Public Schools an even more desirable school system. My focus would be on curriculum cohesiveness and technology specifically related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.) My desire is to make every student a productive, prepared, skilled and educated citizen for the changing world that they will inherit upon graduation.

**2. The word "parity" is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

I believe it means there needs to be an equitable expenditure of resources for our kids. No matter what school one attends parity will ensure that all students in North Haven receive the same curriculum, experiences, and exposure to technology. Parity is fairness.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes, if any, would you propose, and why?**

North Haven offers two high-quality programs. Students and parents seem to be happy with the learning outcomes within both settings. This prompts the question of why any changes would be necessary. North Haven is unique in that we offer families a choice. The decision of whether a child is placed in ID or a traditional classroom should rest on the shoulders of the parents who have consulted with educators to make the appropriate decision. The end product would be a researched decision addressing the best interests of the student.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

The role of being a Board of Education member is to foster a discussion with the Superintendent. It is important to listen to what he has to say but also to consider the impact that policies will have on the school community presently and in the future. By working with other board members, and when applicable the community, we would address the differences, discuss any concerns and by thoroughly examining the action or strategy we as a team could reach a decision that is best for students and the district.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

Board meetings are not timeless. Often there are many items on the agenda. Fielding comments from the public could end up in a discussion where the entire meeting is spent on one or two issues. If public comment is to take place prior to the voting, time limits must be established along with guidelines so the meetings run smoothly. I do believe it is important to hear relevant public comment. A greater pool of opinions could be an asset before any voting. It allows to entertain other perspectives that may have been overlooked or undiscovered.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

Common Core fundamentally is a good plan. I like the fact that students changing from school to school or district to district or even state to state will be entering the school system not having to “catch up” or sit through lessons that contain content already learned. The drawbacks of the Common Core are a little less known. For instance, the standardized assessment will be an online event requiring the need for technology. Logistically and fiscally this could be challenging to the district. Another drawback will be the fact that students well versed in computer skills will progress further than those lacking computer skills. The assessment by which students will be evaluated is lengthy and flawed and the results eventually tied to a teacher’s evaluation. The data then is used to compare school to school or district to district. Again, all of this is based on an assessment that many feel has issues. The Common Core is stagnant. It leaves little room for innovation or exploration, which isn’t proper in a changing world. The standards focus on fixing a broken system, a system that is compared with other countries around the world. We must remember that we test and share ALL student scores, not just scores from select students as other nations do. In fact, when we isolate our top 10 percent, we score amongst the top globally. Standards sound great and read well on paper, but our students are not all equally cognitive, so why lump ALL students together and take a common assessment? The fact of the matter is they are here and hopefully with time modifications will be implemented to rectify the issues embedded within the Common Core.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child’s development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

In a world where leisure activities have shifted toward being in front of some sort of screen I place the importance of music, art, and physical education as unmeasurable. Look at the possible outcomes one would miss. Think of the next Mozart or the choir group Monteverdi being unheard. Think of van Gogh’s The Night Cafe never to be viewed or the next world record in track and field that will never make America proud. All of this can happen if music, art, and physical education were to be “trimmed” for any reason. Today I find our conversations are in print. Texting and email has taken over for “call me, we’ll talk about it”. The social skills these programs provide is too valuable not to have in a technology based society.

Our environment has created a world of caution, which in turn has impacted how our children spend their free time. Children no longer leave for the day at sunrise and return when the street lamps turn on. The physical activities such as going to the playground, building tree forts, or playing stickball all day have been replaced with Playstation and XBox. In a time where golf, tennis, and other sports could all be played on a television or large computer screen, now more than ever we need physical education and the arts within our lives.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

I don't think there will ever be such a thing as too much security but I also believe that North Haven Public Schools has taken appropriate measures and continues take appropriate measures to keep our children safe. As a parent of two children in the system, I have never questioned their safety. Each school has procedures for visitors. Administrators have all attended workshops to relay safety protocol to their staff. Emergency procedures are outlined and rehearsed in schools for the day we all hope never will occur. As an educator teaching through the tragedies of Columbine, Sandy Hook, and most recently in Sparks, Nevada, safety for my colleagues and students is always first priority. We all must be observant and diligent with any issues or concerns regarding school safety. Needless to say, safety should be a priority in our schools. There are many precautions that could be implemented. Safety film on door windows, wireless panic buttons, and other products that may slow down a perpetrator should all be examined. In time of tragedy, every second counts.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

Historically North Haven Schools have been great. We have wonderful students that are eager to learn that are engaged in school activities. I believe this is a reflection on the family value community in which we live. Not all lessons are taught in school. Lessons such as responsibility, respect and organization often are conveyed at home and transfer into the classroom and school. I would encourage this practice to continue. I also believe we have committed strong teachers and administrators from which a system is built upon. This commitment serves as the foundation from which a great school system is built.

The opportunities that I see to make our schools better would be continued K-12 Common Core curriculum development to ensure a fully articulated K-12 program of study. We must remember that a strong school system has a direct relationship to the entire town whether you have children enrolled in public school or not. Property values can be effected by the strength of a town's school system. With this being said, I would like to look into the implementation of additional supports for children who struggle, technology enhancement for communication, support of the curriculum and an adequate budget to meet the needs of all students. This will enable us to provide a comprehensive and committed school system which will attract families to our town.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**  
**GOLDIE ADELE**

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

My top priorities as a board member will be:

A. Common Core- with the transition to the Common Core standards, there will be a major shift in the curriculum, how our kids learn, how teachers teach and are being evaluated, and added responsibilities for principals and other administrators. This is a huge shift for our district and other districts nationwide, who have adopted the Common Core standards. I will work hard with other members of the board and the Superintendent to ensure that this transition is as smooth with little or no disruptions for our kids, the teachers, and administrators. Change is always hard and comes with ups and downs, and I believe that all hands should be on deck to ensure the success of this transition process.

B. School Security- The security of our kids at school is paramount and non-negotiable. To this end, it's critical that we find reliable, common sense, and effective solutions to this issue. There is no one single solution, we have to look at a wide variety of solutions. Currently, the district is in the process of installing various electronic access and monitoring devices at each school. The board chair is also working with Mr. Freda's office and town police chief on additional solutions. Citizens also have an opportunity to make suggestions to the board, which I welcome.

C. New Middle School Project- This is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed and is being addressed by the current board. I have the privilege of being the board's representative on the project committee and hope to use my knowledge and experience to move the process forward and pick the best choice for the town. The best choice is one that has both the best learning environment for our kids, facilities for teachers, and best value for our tax-paying citizens. It's an important and expensive project either way you look at it, but it's needed and I would love to continue my role in ensuring it's done right. I welcome citizens to participate in the process and have their voices heard at the committee meetings.

**2. The word "parity" is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Parity to me means being equal and providing equal access and opportunity. We have a wonderful school district that's diverse in different ways and each school has its unique talents. We want to make sure that we continue to support these talents and diversity in each school and do so with equality and realistic distribution of limited resources. Even with the change to Common Core, we want to ensure that we don't have our schools lose their unique talents and identity. Rather, we want to support and help the programs grow and adapt to the current needs of our kids. Finally, we have to make sure that "every kid" has an opportunity to succeed regardless of which school they attend and other factors. If we let one child fail, we aren't keeping up to our obligations as a district.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

I always believed that kids learn differently and parents should be given choices on how they choose to educate their kids. The ID program provides a different path in educating our kids, which has its history and successes. There is also the contemporary path for parents who choose this path. So, I believe in these options for our kids and the objective is to create the best learning environment that suits their learning style and can nurture their talents. One thing we have to make sure for "both" options, is to continue to assess them. We should also make sure that they are achieving the intended results and our kids are being provided the best opportunities to be competitive and succeed.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

The role of the Superintendent is that of the chief administrative officer of the district. He has a contract and responsibility for creating policy, procedures, and guiding the district. The board works in collaboration with the Superintendent and gives the citizens a voice in the process. The board also reviews and endorses major policy, budget, and personnel issues. If there's any controversy or difference on related issues, the board will play its role in consulting with the Superintendent, especially if it's an issue from the citizens. Hopefully a middle ground can be reached, but as I stated earlier, he is the chief administrative officer for the district and has the responsibility of leading the district. Overall, I do believe the board has a strong and active role in making sure the direction of the district as led by the Superintendent is the right direction and should take necessary steps when needed.

- 5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

I strongly believe in permitting citizens to air their opinions on issues relating to their government, in this case, the school district. But, there has to be some structure to the process e.g. limited time for comments, narrowing comments to agenda issues etc. This is standard practice at public meetings. At the start of each process i.e. budget, new policy proposals etc., the public is always invited to comment and give feedback. The board just started a new advisory committee and having a student rep at public meetings, which provides an additional avenue for citizens to be heard. I always encourage citizens to take advantage of these opportunities, so their ideas are part of the final decision or document. If they respond late to these proposals and discussions, their opportunities may be limited. The board will continue to encourage and publicize these opportunities, with the hope that citizens respond and participate. I would continue to advocate for more opportunities for citizen input and flexibility in how we get comments, especially with the advance of technology and e-mail. Some parents can't make meetings due to tight family obligations, so the question becomes..how can we be flexible, so their voices can be heard? I will also continue to seek suggestions from citizens on what the board can do to make the process better for them.

- 6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

The Common Core is a new set of standards adopted by most states in the U.S. and is aimed at ensuring that the standards at each state is the same and students are competitive globally, especially in english, language, arts and math. It sets curriculum, testing, teacher evaluation standards for districts to follow. This is all new to us and most districts nationwide, so collaboration and patience is needed from parents to ensure this succeeds. Dr. Cronin and his staff have been working on ensuring the district has a smooth transition and our kids experience little or no disruptions. He has also been working on ways to make sure the objectives of the district fit within the requirements of the Core. I would like parents to know that this isn't a bad thing, it's a change... it's a different way for our kids to learn, but the end goal is a positive one. Not every part of this new standard is agreeable, but we will try our best to ensure it benefits our district. Like I stated, with every change, especially substantial, there are going to be bumps on the road. I will do my best to make sure that the Core benefits rather than restricts the growth of our district in terms of students, teachers, and administrators.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

I believe music, arts, and physical education are an integral part of the learning process. They provide alternative learning avenues for our kids and builds their character, social, and leadership skills. Having said that, we have to realistically and effectively distribute our limited financial resources. We have to be creative and think out-of-the-box in doing so. But, we should not take any action that compromises the nature and benefit of these and other related programs. We should also continue to look at additional funding sources for these programs, such as government and private grants, sponsorships etc.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

Like I stated earlier, school security is an important and non-negotiable issue which must be addressed. Fortunately, the current board is addressing it with current changes in each school per access monitoring and other proposals still in discussion. With school security, there's no "one size fits all" solution or 100% full-proof solution, it has to be a mixed basket of solutions. One of the most important solutions is vigilance by teachers, parents, kids, and school administrators. If parents observe their kids and kids see their friends say, do, or act out-of-place, they should be pro-active and say something to someone. Let's be more pro-active than re-active. We should all do our part to ensure our schools are safe. In addition, we should address bullying and name calling as part of creating a safe environment for our kids. We should continue to teach our kids to respect and treat each other the same regardless of differences. So I do believe the board is on the right track on school security and doing the best we can. We welcome citizen input through the process.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

The most important aspect to a great school district is the commitment to learning, which is clear in the North Haven School District. Commitment from the students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Though there exist various opinions on how and what should be done, the number one objective is providing our kids a world class learning environment. Another feature that makes it a great school district is its commitment to extra-curricular activities like sports, music, arts etc. This commitment



helps build the complete student and ensures that our students are competitive nationally and globally.

I see a unique opportunity to continue my work on the board to ensure proper implementation of Common Core, solutions for school security, and ensuring the efficient and timely completion of the middle school project. I think working at the foundational stages of a new curriculum and standards, emerging security issue, and major construction project presents an opportunity for me to further use my over 10 years' experience in education, policy and processes, legal issues, compliance, and access.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**ANITA ANDERSON**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I have been an elected member of the Board of Education for 4 years and the Chairperson for 1.5 years. My family moved to town when our oldest was ready for school, because of the education system and I am proud to say both of my boys are graduates of the North Haven School system.

I have been actively involved in the school system for over 23 years serving as a member of PTA's, as President of Clintonville School and President of PTA Council.

I want to remain on the BOE to continue and complete the many initiatives we have started including: our 5 year strategy plan we are putting together with our First Selectman and the Teacher's union, continue to work on our Policy updates, improving our curriculum in a time of change, enhancing our technology, improving school security and having monthly meetings with PTA Presidents with our Superintendent to discuss issues and challenges, especially as we move into budget season.

I am committed to the education of our children as our future leaders and will continue to work with our teachers and administrators to ensure each child gets a well-rounded education that prepares them for life upon graduation.

**1. What would be your top priority as a Board member and why?**

To continue our long held tradition of educational excellence in the three "A's" Academics, the Arts and Athletics for all students no matter where there strength's may lie. Ensuring our teachers are continuing their professional development and fully updated on the latest technology to enhance learning for all.

To maintain a fiscally responsible budget, allowing for as many services as possible to our students. Continue to work within the system with our teacher's, Director of Curriculum Melinda McKenna and Our Finance Director Kristine Carling to apply for as many grants as we are eligible for both within the state, and federal governments as well as within the private sector.

As the present Board Chairperson, I have opened the lines of communications with all stakeholders; parent's, administrator's, teacher's, student's town government and community and will continue to do so, as we move forward to work on school security, our 5 year strategic plan, the education budget and the new Common Core State Standards.

**2. The word “parity” is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings—what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Parity means to me that it is fair to all concerned. Every child is entitled to the same education and learning experience across the board, including art, gym, music and extra-curricular activities. All teachers will have access to the same resources to educate our children. Parity in our schools especially in the elementary levels will enhance the transition and learning of our students going into the Middle School.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes—if any—would you propose, and why?**

I have the experience of having one child attend the Integrated Day program and one child attend the Contemporary program, both my children received an exceptional elementary school education. Children learn in different ways, the Integrated Day program was the right choice for my older son and the Contemporary program for my younger son. There are many differences in the programs but there are also many similarities as the contemporary classrooms move to a more project focus learning environment. The two programs both are part of the responsive classroom program and they share music, art and other non-classroom teachers.

We are very fortunate as a school district to be able to offer two types of classrooms and should continue to offer the two options to our elementary students throughout the district.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent’s proposed action or strategy?**

As a current board member and Chairperson of the Board of Education, I have had difference of opinions with the Superintendent. We will start with a common ground and move forward from there, I may ask for data to support his decision or strategy that can show me his approach is the best approach, we will discuss past practice and current practice as a means to open our dialogue. I bring to our discussions a history and knowledge of our town that our Superintendent, who is relatively new to our district, would need to know to understand the climate of the district when he is making decisions.

The Superintendent's role is to work within the guidelines of the policy and procedures that the BOE sets. If an issue does not have to do with policy and procedure he has the executive privilege to make the final decision as it pertains to staffing, transferring teachers and administrators. That being said, we have a mutual respect for each other’s position and that of each BOE member and work to settle our differences by working together to reach a compromise that is in the best interest for the education of our children.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and**

**District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment—what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes—if any – would you make to these structures?**

I take public comment very seriously it is a vital part of communication between the BOE and the public. I believe public comment should be at the end of a meeting. The BOE has improved communication and is utilizing the PTA's to help communicate our issues. We have initiated a monthly meeting with the PTA presidents and the Superintendent to review issues that are brought up to the BOE for discussion and ultimately vote. We list our workshops and welcome the public to attend, although there is no public comment at workshops, calls/emails can be made to the superintended and/or to board members to voice any concerns or comments.

There is much opportunity for the public to contact the BOE or Superintendent to discuss any item that is on the Agenda. I am not opposed to amending the agenda to allow for public comment during the BOE discussions on a case by case situation. The current BOE has asked for public comments during the discussion phase of an agenda item before an item has gone to vote on several occasions.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

Common Core is clear goals with consistent strong benchmarks for student achievement that will allow our children to learn the same lessons as those across the nation and globally. It will focus on skills in English and Math that each child must achieve to get ahead to the next level. We will be able to design are own curriculum to teach common core and our teachers will still be able to teach life lessons and creativity.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art and physical education to a child's development and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

Music, art and physical education are a major part of a child and young adult's physical and intellectual development. All teach cognitive skills, creativity, reasoning, critical thinking and self-confidence. When I look at the budget, I weigh music, art, physical education and social services with other classes and services that we offer to our students. I do not look at these as "extra's or special's" but classes that must be in a well rounded curriculum.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

We have done a good job in updating our security system, some of which have recently been noted in the news and the papers. We need to ensure that schools and after-school activities continue to be a safe haven for all. I have been in discussions with Mr. Freda our First Selectman, Chief McLoughlin, Deputy Chief Mulhern our police commissioner's, Kristine Carling BOE Finance Director and Dr. Cronin about other ways

we can increase security in our schools. Collectively everyone is in agreement to increase police presence in the elementary schools and the middle school; we are having discussions on how best to implement this plan.

We also need to continue to engage our teachers and administrators to be aware of changes in our student's behaviors and mental health issues. As things change in a student's life, i.e. parent's break up, girlfriend/boyfriend issues, academic problems we need to provide the resources for our students to have someone they could talk too about their problems.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

Our children leave North Haven School district ready and prepared to meet life's challenges and rewards, whatever path they choose to follow. Our teachers and support staff are among the best in the state with strong desires to teach and learn new methods to help all students achieve success. Our curriculum although guided by State and Federal mandates, allows for teaching to the individual child; creativity, thinking skills and problem solving which will be used throughout a student's lifetime are taught from kindergarten through graduation.

We have a caring environment in all schools, our teachers, administrators and councilors; truly care about the "whole" child.

We look at and evaluate our technology program every year to ensure that we are offering the students and teachers current technology whether it is software or hardware to teach and learn. Our BOE is made up of a diverse group of hardworking volunteers, which believe in education and the future of our children with our only Agenda being all students leave North Haven with a well-rounded education that allows them to be successful adults and contributing citizens.

I would like to see partnering within the District with local business and Quinnipiac University, exposing our students to the business world, different trades and secondary education.

Each and every person in our town is a stakeholder in children's education and the future of our country.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**Bryan Bogen**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a Board of Education member?**

I am a certified financial planner and advisor and have over 20 years of experience in the field. I have been a Board member for 3 years and have served on the Finance Committee and have been instrumental in the budget preparation process and in developing ways to realize savings and cost-cutting measures. In addition, I have had input in all aspects of business that has come before the Board. I believe my contributions have been of value and the Board is better- served by including an individual with financial expertise and Board experience as well.

**1. What would be your top priority as a Board member and why?**

To continue my service on the Finance Committee and ensure a sound fiscal budget and education system; to contribute to decision-making on the Middle School issue; to ensure that we offer the highest quality education to all of our students; to ensure the safety of our students and staff and to address all aspects of the North Haven school system as needs, issues or problems arise.

**2. The word “parity” is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings—what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Parity to me implies equality, fairness and a level playing field. I believe that we should afford every student the same opportunities and choices regardless of which elementary school he or she attends. The same would be true for the Middle and High School students. Curriculum should be uniform as should be extra-curricular activities, athletics, field trips, etc.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes—if any—would you propose, and why?**

I see the merit in both types of classrooms. It is my impression that the Integrated Day works well for those students who exhibit a high degree of self-motivation and the ability to learn in a less-structured environment. For those students who function most successfully in a structured, directed environment, the Contemporary classroom appears to be a better choice. I have met and known outstanding students who have been members of each of these classroom types. I don't believe that one is superior to

the other. As long as we continue to have the ideal number of students requesting the Integrated Day classroom, I would continue to offer both.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

I will listen to the superintendent's proposals, obtain all of the facts, weigh all of the options, ask questions if necessary and then make my decisions based on all of these factors. Differences of opinion can be a good thing and often result in a compromise that serves all parties involved in the most advantageous way.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment—what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes—if any – would you make to these structures?**

I believe that as elected Board of Education members, we have been entrusted with making decisions that best suit the needs of our students, our staff and our community. While public comment and feedback are important to the Board, to delay votes until after both are heard would impede the workings of the Board and votes would often have to be tabled until another meeting could be held. I do propose that for both Board meetings and District Workshops, the opportunity for the public to submit comments and/or feedback could be offered prior to the meetings and workshops. That would ensure that all ideas would be considered before votes and decisions are rendered.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

Common Core is a recent concept that has been proposed for all school systems throughout the country. The goal of Common Core is to unify education so that a student in rural Nebraska is learning the same thing as a student in urban New York City. Curriculum would be standard for every school system in every town, city and state. It is too early to predict how Common Core will change the landscape of education but it is a concept to be monitored and evaluated often. Will it better our school system? That remains uncertain but I will suggest that the Board of Education inform parents as to its progress and our opinion of the approach.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art and physical education to a child's development and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

I believe that music, art and physical education are all an important part of a child's education. Our goal is to produce well-rounded individuals as graduates of the North Haven school system. Each of these disciplines contributes to a child's exposure to studies that enhance daily life and the enjoyment and knowledge of areas that will be

useful during one's lifetime. I would continue to be certain that these departments will be funded in the budget and would not be singled out as the first one's cut should cuts be necessary.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

I am confident that we have initiated several new measures to ensure the safety of our students and staff. Do I think that they are 100% guarantees of safety and no harm can ever come to them? NO. I believe that we must continue to investigate methods and practices that will intensify our approach to school safety. Whether that be through the use of ID cards that must be swiped in order to gain entry into a school and/or the hiring of police officers for every school or other suggestions that have been proposed, all should be considered and we should implement those that we can logistically manage and those that we are able to fund. We should review our safety measures each year.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

Our North Haven schools are great!! One only need take a look around at the very successful individuals who have been educated in our schools and have chosen to make their homes here, raise their children here and educate those children in the North Haven school system. I don't believe they would make that choice if they were not confident that our school system could "do the job". In addition, we continue to attract new young families to our town and often the reason for selecting a home in North Haven is the excellent school system that we offer. Can we be better? Certainly we can! I would like to see our test scores rise, our curriculum be enhanced to provide classes for our students who excel. Currently those students are offered enrichment after the normal school day. This precludes athletes and others who have after school obligations and cannot remain. Why not enrichment during the day? We offer classes for those students who are best served by receiving additional instruction. Other systems offer Talented and Gifted classes. Why don't we do the same? Are we shortchanging those students? Let's bring parity to this area. Making our schools better should involve input from the Board, parents, and staff and of, course, our students. We can all work together to achieve a common goal--- making the North Haven School System the best that it can be.



**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**Jennifer Cecarelli**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I would like to start by thanking the North Haven PTAs, the staff of NHTV, and those here at North Haven High School for giving the Board of Education candidates the opportunity to share their views on our town's education system. My goals are to be a voice for families, working with the Board on policy that expresses the will of constituents, to ensure that North Haven's educational system is the highest possible quality, and keeping costs reasonable so as not to further burden our taxpayers.

I have been an educator for 20 years. I am also a parent of two children in North Haven schools; one in elementary school, and one at NHMS. I am a multi-faceted stakeholder who understands education deeply, and works on both sides of the issues, as a parent and a teacher. I hold Education degrees from UCONN and from SCSU. I am currently a second grade teacher with 25 students in Middletown, and I also work as an education consultant for a dozen early learning centers in CT.

This year is a critical one for the Board of Education...not just because there are so many seats to be filled; rather because we are at a pivotal time for both curriculum and policy. Our State has adopted the Common Core Standards, and teachers are working to adapt to the new curriculum, which asks children to think more deeply and conceptually than ever before. The State of Connecticut has mandated a new teacher evaluation system called "SEED"- System for Educator Evaluation and Development. This model of evaluating teacher performance is extremely detailed, and requires more man-hours than any preceding evaluation system. This year, North Haven students will not take the Connecticut Mastery test. Instead, they will take a new measure to ascertain their progress called the Smarter Balance exam. During this perfect storm of transition, Teachers and students will be under a great deal of pressure. Never before has it been more imperative to ensure that the emotional climate in our schools is one that is positive and supportive.

As a teacher and a parent, I am able to see the value in the new initiatives, while at the same time keeping a working knowledge of what things look like as they play out in the trenches. I will expect excellence from our school district, yet I understand exactly what

teachers are going through to help children achieve their highest potential- I know it because I live it. I will be a voice for our constituents and work as a team with other Board Members to ensure that North Haven's schools are exemplary places to learn.

## **1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

As a Board member, I would have several top priorities:

1) To improve communication among all educational stakeholders- the board, North Haven families, our schools, and our administrators. This would be accomplished through:

- Listening to the ideas, concerns, and feedback of North Haven residents before decisions are made, to be sure we remain firmly anchored to the fact that everything we do as Board members impacts students. If we drift away from this central fact and become enmeshed too deeply in discussion of policy and ideas, we can lose sight of how this plays out on a daily basis in our schools. By listening to families, we remain grounded to goal of our public service.
- Through positive communication, we validate residents' concerns, and we are able to work towards productive resolutions collaboratively. Without an open line of communication among all stakeholders, we perpetuate a "culture of adversaries" where only the squeaky wheels are heard and recognized. This divisive approach creates a rift between the Board and the community, and comes at the expense of our children. Working as a team where all involved are given a voice, allows us to work together to find solutions.
- By listening to the people who work with the Board's policies and initiatives on a daily basis- our teachers! What might look fantastic in the boardroom often looks quite different when it is implemented in the classroom. Keeping an open line of communication with teachers is a tremendous growth opportunity for our district. Teachers are able to provide honest feedback, and should be able to provide that feedback directly to the board. Oftentimes, when we rely on principals to share teacher perspectives with the superintendent, and then wait for the superintendent to share with the Board, the feedback appears differently than teachers may have intended. There are so many new and labor-intensive initiatives in place in our district this year that it is critical that the board hear directly from teachers.

2) To improve the climate in our schools for teachers, students, and families. I believe that a cornerstone of a strong educational system is for all stakeholders to feel supported.

- Board members, in collaboration with the superintendent and administrators, need to recognize that in order for our district to find success during a time of major

educational transition, we need to make our schools places where children, teachers, and families all feel they have a voice.

- Students at the middle school level should be given the opportunity to explore a variety of trades, in addition to their academic and cultural arts studies. By not providing classes in the industrial arts, we send our middle schoolers the message that these areas are not important, and as a result, some students become disenchanted with school.
- Middle school students who struggle academically need a stronger support network that has as its foundation an intervention program that is implemented with fidelity. Middle school teachers need to be provided with the resources and support to make this a reality and not an additional stressor. Without this academic support, even more students may “give up” on their own learning.
- The Board needs to ensure that our district’s Title 1 funds are used, as they are intended- to support the programs that directly impact our district’s neediest students. Using these funds to cover expenses such as curriculum writing (as they are currently) does not directly support our most at-risk students.

3) To limit high-stakes testing as much as possible within the legislated parameters.

- Our state has adopted the Common Core State Standards and its associated test the “SMARTER Balance”. This year, Connecticut school districts had the opportunity to select one of three options to measure student success: a) the SMARTER Balance exam (31 states are utilizing this exam); b) the Connecticut Mastery Test; c) A combination of the two previous options. North Haven has opted to implement the SMARTER Balance. I believe that this test should be utilized for the sole purpose of informing instruction and not as a heavy-handed accountability measure.
- Assessments need to be kept to a manageable level. Constant data collection takes teachers away from their classes, and sacrifices valuable time for teachers to learn with their students. We need to ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of this assessment? Is it to inform instruction, or simply to say we gave it?” We should only be subjecting children to testing that has the potential to improve their learning on a daily basis; not merely to increase scores on a test that is given once a year.

**2. The word “parity” is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

I believe that “Parity” as it relates to education in North Haven means equity in resources and experiences, and seems most relevant to schools at the elementary level. I do not believe that “parity” means “exactly the same”. Every school has its own culture and heritage; this is something to be celebrated and preserved. I do believe, however, that all of the children in North Haven should have access to the same

learning opportunities. Parity should be especially evident in curriculum, programming (music, cultural arts, off-site learning), technology, and class size. Every effort should be made by the Board to ensure that all students in North Haven have equal access to outstanding learning opportunities in all areas.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

As a parent of one student who is currently in the program at Ridge Road School, and another who graduated from the program three years ago, I can assure you that I am a passionate advocate for the philosophy! I am an elementary educator (I teach 2nd Grade in Middletown), and I try to replicate the ID format as often as I can in my own traditional classroom.

As a teacher in a building where the Contemporary approach is most often used, I also recognize the value in a more structured approach to learning. All children learn differently, and I appreciate the opportunity that North Haven provides for parents to select the learning environment that best suits the needs of their children.

To comment for a moment specifically on ID, the ID philosophy meshes beautifully with the Common Core Standards. The Core requires a depth of thinking that I believe is best facilitated through project-based studies. What people may not realize is that the ID instructional format also works extremely well with the other major initiative currently facing Connecticut public schools- the SEED (System for Educator Evaluation and Development) Evaluation. A version of this evaluation has been mandated for every school district in CT, and North Haven has opted to implement the State SEED model. The excellent news for ID is that in order for teachers to be judged as successful, they need to include students in the planning of their studies, implement student-led learning, and also include students in the creation of rubrics for measuring their learning success- the ID program does an outstanding job with all of this. I believe as we move through this evaluation process, ID teachers can be a valuable resource for their Contemporary colleagues. In the same way, Contemporary teachers will be extraordinary resources for their ID colleagues as they work to integrate the Common Core into their programs.

Board of Education policy requires the Superintendent of Schools to be available meet with Board of Education candidates, should candidates wish to have any questions answered. Dr. Cronin welcomed my visit, and we met for over an hour. His ideas regarding the future of the ID program was one of the top items on my discussion agenda. I shared with him my belief that the ID philosophy is an ideal partner for both the Common Core and the SEED evaluation program, and he concurred. I let him know

that I support the families advocating for ensuring the longevity of such a comprehensive, high quality approach to learning. He echoed my praise of the program.

As a Board member, I would advocate for any family who wishes their child to be taught with the ID philosophy to be able to have that opportunity. I feel that if two programs exist, parents should have the ability to choose the program that best suits the needs of their children *without worrying that they may be turned away or placed on a waiting list.* "The program has traditionally had only 2 sections of each class" is a response I have heard from Board members as well as our superintendent, and I am not comfortable when learning is bound by tradition rather than enhanced by it. When I mentioned the growing interest in project-based learning, as well as the outstanding foundation it provides for some of education's newer initiatives, Dr. Cronin stated that he's open to exploring a variety of ID options. As a Board member, I will continue to be a strong voice for all families as they select the program that best suits their children's learning style.

I can assure you that my goal as a Board member will be not only to see this program continue to evolve and flourish- it will also be to ensure that the public has accurate information regarding the structure of the program today, as opposed to what it looked like 40 years ago. The only way to make sound decisions in any arena is with accurate, current information and first-hand knowledge; this is especially true in education, where there are so many stakeholders.

North Haven is incredibly fortunate to have two outstanding models of teaching and learning at the elementary level- I believe all families should be able to choose the model that is right for their child.

#### **4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

In any collegial relationship, differences of opinion are inevitable. The discourse that accompanies differences is essential to learning and growth. An open dialogue with the superintendent is part of a multi-tiered decision-making process that should be regarded as a learning opportunity for all stakeholders. It is my opinion that as many of these discussions as possible should be held during Board meetings, so that the entire Board and the public would have the opportunity to listen to the evolution of decisions, and obtain more information through attending to the discourse.

It is very important to keep in mind that the superintendent strives to work within the expectations of how the Board has determined that our schools should be governed. The Board must ask itself, "Do the superintendent's recommendations match our

vision?" If they don't, then a thorough discussion must follow. Board members need to be open to what may be alternative points of view presented by the superintendent. After carefully considering his rationale, as well as incorporating ideas and concerns from town residents, and finally using policy as a guide, the Board must determine whether further research on their part is necessary to make the best decision for our students. After obtaining input from all stakeholders and engaging in open dialogue, the Board should then proceed to a vote.

- 5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

*As a Board of Education member, I would advocate for stronger communication among all educational stakeholders. The Board is meant to be a voice for constituents, and by reserving public comment for after votes have been made, it sends the message that regardless of public opinion, the Board "is going to do what it's going to do".*

*Currently, there is no Board policy that would preclude the public comment portion of the meeting from being held at the beginning of the meeting.*

*As a Board member, I would advocate for public comments related to items on the agenda to be heard at the beginning of the meeting, with the customary 3-minute rule to be in place for speakers. Members of our community have excellent insights to contribute to educational dialogue. Hearing these contributions prior to discussions and votes would be an asset to the process. Many Boards of Education in surrounding towns have adopted this format, and have reported it to be successful. The traditional time for public comment on any educational topic would remain at the end of the meeting.*

*Board of Education workshops are often dedicated to continuing the education of the Board members in a variety of areas related to educational policy and practice. They are also devoted to working on more extensive projects, such as the annual budget. As a Board member, I would advocate for community input related to these workshops. I would recommend that (according to Board policy), "special" meetings be called should community members wish to discuss workshop issues in detail, and should they wish to express their opinions on these issues. If it is determined that these issues need to be brought to the table as an action item (brought to a vote), then at the conclusion of the special meeting, members can decide to have the issue of concern added to the agenda for an upcoming meeting as an action item. Again, at this meeting, based on*

*my proposal, interested parties could share their opinions on these items prior to the Board's vote.*

I feel the role of the “special meeting” is a very important one that must be used in tandem with public comment at the beginning of the regular meeting. Without this “special meeting”, Board members would be hearing information for the first time and not have much time to process it before voting. The “special meeting” allows community members to share their ideas and concerns, and gives the board time to process it and ask questions prior to the vote at a regular meeting.

## **6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

The Common Core is a curriculum designed to move the American educational system away from “a mile wide and an inch deep” towards enhancing students’ thinking and asking them to think more deeply and conceptually than ever before.

Here is what I’d like parents to know about it:

- The Core is not a radical change; in fact, Connecticut’s previous curriculum, the Connecticut State Standards, was not far off from the Common Core.
- The Core is not all that “new”. Our state has been preparing for this change for several years. Many districts adopted the Core gradually, using what was called “The Common Core Crosswalk”, which outlined the similarities and differences between the Connecticut State Standards and the Common Core- there were far more similarities than differences.
- Most teachers aren’t “against” the Common Core. “Roughly two-thirds of educators are either wholeheartedly in favor of the standards (26 percent) or support them with “some reservations” (50 percent). Only 11 percent of those surveyed expressed opposition. Thirteen percent didn’t know enough about the CCSS to form an opinion. Overall, 98 percent of NEA (National Education Association) members have heard of the standards. In addition, 79 percent of respondents said they were well or somewhat prepared to implement the new standards.” The survey questioned 1200 NEA members and was conducted in July by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.
- Prior to a national curriculum, states designed their own tests (e.g., the Connecticut Mastery Test) to measure students’ academic mastery. The trouble came when the test results were utilized to compare student success from state-to-state. Some states (like Connecticut) had very rigorous tests, while others did not. Consequently, education officials were comparing “apples to oranges” as they evaluated the quality of education across the country. This was extremely frustrating for teachers, as their students may have scored lower than those in another state; however the test in that

other state may have been much less rigorous than Connecticut's. The Common Core and the SMARTER Balance test at least levels the playing field with reference to state-to-state comparisons.

- The Common Core outlines concepts that should be mastered at each grade level. It does NOT tell teachers how to teach those concepts, although resources for how to do so are widely available. Teachers still have control over the vehicle they use to teach the material. Talented teachers know their students well, and can engage them in deeper, more conceptual thinking by presenting material in the way that they know will resonate best with their students.
- The Common Core was adopted by the state legislature. School districts do not have a choice as to whether they implement it or not.
- If one were to compare the two major initiatives impacting our classrooms today, the Common Core is far less of a burden on educators than the new SEED (System for Educator Evaluation and Development) teacher evaluation program.
- Many folks who speak out against the Common Core do so because they are dissatisfied that our state has relinquished local control over curriculum, which is a legitimate concern; however, many people have never read the actual curriculum. *I highly recommend that you reserve judgment until you read some of the curriculum yourself. You may do so at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=322592>.*

Finally, as a parent and an educator, I am thrilled that the debate on the Common Core has so many people talking about education!

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

It is my belief that how a school district chooses to spend its money should be aligned with its stated mission and priorities for students. The vision of the North Haven Public Schools is to prepare young people "with the skills to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century". In order to realize this vision, our school district must continue to view education through a holistic lens, realizing that it is our obligation to educate the whole child as a lifelong learner.

Music, art, and physical education are essential components of a well-rounded education, and nurture creativity, mathematic, and language skills in students of all ages. These subject areas are in my opinion, "non-elective"; in other words, they are non-negotiable components of a high quality education that ultimately contribute to a high quality of life in adulthood.



As a Board of Education member, I would advocate for these subject areas to be treated as equally essential as mathematics and language arts learning. I would also advocate for each school to retain full-time special area teachers (including instrumental music teachers) in order that they may continue to provide the highest quality experiences for children to an exemplary level. North Haven has extraordinary arts and athletic programs- as a Board member; my goal would be to preserve them at all costs!

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

I believe that school safety can (and should) be enhanced, and should include (but not be limited to) the following:

- Police officers at every school during arrival and dismissal
- Police officers to make interior patrols at every school at least once a day, at varying times, so as not to present a predictable pattern
- Police officers to make exterior patrols at every school 1-2 times per day at varying times. These exterior patrols should include school grounds and building perimeter
- Police observation of unannounced lockdown drills at all schools to provide feedback on school safety efforts
- I believe that by using officers currently employed by the Town of North Haven (as opposed to an independent security contractor), the Board of Education will save money, and student safety will be in the hands of currently trained professionals with a direct investment in the town, and local accountability.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

The North Haven Public Schools offer an incredible range of opportunities for students at every grade level. I am particularly appreciative of the following:

- Full time special area teachers at every school
- A Creative Learning Program that challenges, inspires, and motivates
- An Integrated Day, project-based, instructional option for families who elect it for their children
- Outstanding teachers who are dedicated, passionate, and experienced educators
- On-site after school care for children
- An outstanding music program from K-12
- PTAs that are active and dedicated to family-school partnerships
  - A high school that has a wide variety of learning opportunities including several world languages, many AP classes, a partnership with community agencies, and an excellent athletic department

These are just a few!

Opportunities for growth include:

- Home/School communication at the middle and high school levels
- Bringing industrial arts back to the middle school
- Declining enrollment- why, and how can we ensure we maintain programs?
- A graduation rate of 95.4% in 2012- in the 2012-2013, 24 students did not graduate- we need to improve these numbers
- At risk students (academically, mentally, and socially) need more support, especially during the middle school years
- Parents of special education students need more support as their children transition from elementary school to middle school and beyond
- Communication needs to be enhanced among all educational stakeholders so that all members of our community have an authentic voice in education
- Working tirelessly on the budget to ensure preservation of programs without raising taxes for constituents

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**NICHOLAS COPPOLA**

1. **What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

*If elected, my main goals will be...*

***To fight the disease of “rank-and-file”.***

In my business, as a consultant, I am paid to know the answers or for my ability to find the answers. I believe that being a “professional” means that you do not defer thoughtful analysis and decision making to someone in the State or Federal Governments. For that, we might as well cut some high salaries and simply call the district decision-making on the most important decisions what it is; puppeteering from the outside.

I believe that we should both support and expect our leadership and administrators to do what is in the best interest of the children, parents, and tax-payers of North Haven and hold them accountable to what we have hired them to do. I do not believe that to be an unfair or unrealistic expectation.

***To encourage Board Members & Administrators to ask “What”, “Why” and “How Much”***

Similar to the above-mentioned, we need to encourage Board Members and Administrators to ask the basic questions as it relates to the best interest of North Haven children, parents, and tax-payers. We put these individuals into their positions, not to answer first to the State and certainly not the Federal government, but to define North Haven as a school district to envy. In 2007 North Haven was listed by Money Magazine as one of the top places to live. First Selectman Freda has referred to North Haven as a “gem”. Well, we all know that part of such a definition takes into consideration the quality of our schools. I simply find it hard to believe we can be such a district when we need to appear economically depressed in order to gain Title I funding, when we follow the State’s (Federally Prescribed) agenda which is clearly focused on schools from a demographic that do not match that of North Haven and mediocrity. So, it is imperative that we respectfully challenge such propositions with questions like “What exactly is this?”, “Why are we going to be doing this?”, “How is this good?”, “Where is the data that proves it will work?”, and “How much will it cost the tax-payers?”

***To give teachers a voice without fear of retribution***

Having close family members and friends who are teachers I am well aware of the challenges teachers are facing today, not only within the classroom, but also within the ever increasing beauracracy. I agree that schools need to be run like businesses, but I diverge from conventional thinking when it comes to defining the ideal environment for learning. Such an environment needs to be one where the only concern teachers have is in reaching the children and inspiring them to be more than they ever thought they could be. That simply doesn't happen when teacher evaluations become the number one task of administrators. That simply doesn't happen when teachers fear how the scores of children whom they've taught only a small portion of that child's school career will reflect upon them as educators. Will having a low performing child in a teacher's classroom be perceived as a liability?

The key, in my opinion, is to engage teachers (and not just certain ones who support our ideas) to provide the essential feedback that we need. They are the people we entrust with our children and I trust they know better than most what is going on. If in the proper context teachers fear that disagreeing with the administration is insubordination then how can we possibly rely on these teachers to make sure the system is acting in the best interest of all our students.

***To make sure parents understand the responsibility that comes with the right to oversee their children's education***

I consider myself a student of the Constitution and as such have come to truly value concepts like sovereignty and liberty. Case law has long supported the right of parents to have the final say in their child's education. However, no actual piece of legislation exists to enforce that precedent. This right is particularly fragile and one that requires vigilance in maintaining and executing.

How we do parents go about doing this? Well, you do this by actively vetting those who are interested in running for office. What do they stand for? Do they demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for the rights of parents and tax-payers? You do this by supporting those you have voted in, not blindly or unconditionally, but by working together with them to represent the interest of parents and the people of the town. We hardly have enough time to be involved in everything in order to make sure it runs as it should. To that point, we can focus on making sure the person you vote into office will take the time to communicate what is going on and you will take the time to keep abreast via that communication.

What we need to avoid at all cost, is our "assuming" that business is being conducted as it should and with our interests and rights in mind. Too many people have been conditioned to think that government knows better regarding what's good for you than you know for yourself. The message we send should be clear. That message should be "We have delegated certain functions to you because of your background and a common interest shared by towns and states. That said, your actions need to bring value to our community and we possess the power to either recind those delegated

responsibilities or to assert our sovereignty, which is something that you do not possess in your capacity.”

**2. The word “parity” is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

“Parity” means to establish a sense of equality. To me, that would mean that across the district, the same opportunities and access to resources are made accessible regardless of the school. I personally grew up in the Montowese section of town and can tell you that back in the seventies parity was something that even the students felt did not exist.

I believe and support an administration that strives for parity. I also am well aware that squeaky wheels get the grease and would applaud parents who organize themselves and represent the interests of their schools and area of town. Additionally, I would encourage all parent groups to communicate with each other and to seek to become aware of the interests and challenges that exist not just in their school, but district wide. I would be happy to be a party to facilitating such communication.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

My eldest son went through the ID program and my youngest son is in the ID program at Green Acres. I have nothing but appreciation for the program and do not like that the current Board seems unwilling to state clearly that ID is here to stay. In comparison, I went through the Contemporary model and graduated from North Haven having finished very well in my class.

I suspect that, if we were to look at those who have graduated from North Haven in the top of their respective classes, we would find many to be past graduates from the ID program. That would be an easy statistic to arrive at and yet I've never seen it. I regret that living in Montowese as a child, I did not know ID was an option, but then again it may not have been at that time. I still did well, but really like the ID concept and we have been fortunate that both of our children were able to participate in and have taken to the program very well.

The fact remains that the vast majority of children here in North Haven are going through their elementary years via the Contemporary program and they are served well. I would advocate for ways to make sure we match children to the program that is most appropriate and to make sure the program can expand or contract to accommodate the population.

I believe people want to know if I support both models and I do. I would fight to keep the ID program alive and well. On that thought, I am willing to fight to make sure

Common Core doesn't derail either of these models. Where the Contemporary model will morph to come inline with Common Core and I argue not necessarily for the better, I fear that the ID program flies in the face of the one size fits all core and will not survive if it comes under scrutiny.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy ?**

Perhaps I am naive in my understanding of how Boards of Education work, but as someone who is elected by you, I see my purpose as needing to represent your interests and the best interests of the school district that is meant to serve you. To that end, I do not view the Superintendent as above reproach. I would hope that all the members and the Superintendent can conduct ourselves in a professional and respectful manner. I have no reason to believe that is not possible. Yet, my purpose is clear and even if I am out voted, my responsibility to you will be to advise you on the contention, my position, and how I feel it is or is not in the interest of the people of this town. Alone, I am just a vote, but together we are a voice.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

Public comment and feedback is paramount to any elected official conducting themselves in the interest of the voters and to ensure accountability. There are some things that trouble me related to this. The first is that the current Board of Education speaks of communication as if it is some novel idea to be implemented. It is a poor reflection of priorities that we claim to want parental involvement but some simple mechanism for communicating Board of Education topics and activities to the stakeholders in the town has yet to be rolled out. Likewise, an advisory committee has been formed, but in its definition is not a permanent entity and only here temporarily as new policies are developed.

I do not believe we provide enough time for the public to communicate its questions/concerns and I am not convinced that making an already long Board of Education meeting longer is the solution. I think that people should be able to communicate their questions/concerns in a convenient manner, that those questions/concerns could be made visible for other members of the public to see, and the Board of Education could provide acknowledgement of those questions/concerns. Doing the right thing is not always the easiest thing and out of respect for the fact that the Board Member position is both elected and voluntary, I am sure a solution can be

found to vastly improve public involvement and awareness without making the process overly tedious.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

**I want parents to know that beneath the marketing to get parents to buy into it, the Common Core is Education's equivalent of the Affordable Healthcare Act.**

I have prepared this response with information that I have obtained in my quest to better understand the Common Core.

There are numerous reasons to object to the implementation of the Common Core (CC). For starters, I object to the manner in which they were created, adopted and funded, and feel strongly that it is unconstitutional. Beyond that, if we must still examine the CC, I would have you consider the following:

1. Having finally been written and in many cases after States adopted the standards, it remains questionable whether these new standards are any better than what CT was doing previously.
2. Materials aligned to the CC and reported from various parts of the country indicate an intent to indoctrinate rather than teach students. In other words CC aligned materials seek to teach children what to think rather than how to think.
3. The creation of an invasive student and family online database is troubling, as is the coinciding relaxation of State and Federal privacy laws.
4. The massive cost of implementing Common Core, will strain our state and community.

**Let's look at how the Common Core Standards were created**

Contrary to the playbook marketing by those with a financial interest in CC, the Common Core standards were not developed by and did not come from states. In actuality, they were funded and developed by two Washington, D.C.-based trade organizations, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA). These organizations employed Achieve, Inc., and massive funding was obtained from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other private donors.

It is worth noting the backgrounds of some Common Core developers, much like we might want to know the backgrounds of people on a committee who would spend the town's money. Common Core standardized test creator Linda Darling-Hammond was President Obama's top choice for education secretary but was never nominated

because of her controversial leftist leanings; she is a close associate of domestic terrorist turned educator Bill Ayers. Common Core was developed in closed meetings, without public debate, by committees who are not directly accountable to us.

### **How Was Common Core Adopted by States?**

State Governors or State Boards of Education signed on to Common Core standards, in many cases, before even seeing the standards. These Governors and Boards of Education were incented and essentially “bribed” by promises of federal Race to the Top (RTTT) grants by the Obama administration. These funds were packaged into the 2009 Stimulus Package where the Dept of Education was given over 4 Billion dollars to effect change to Public Education in the U.S. Only some states received money from the competitive RTTT grants. Yet, states were also threatened with the loss of No Child Left Behind waivers if they did not align, which would have meant significant loss of federal financial support. State legislatures, which represent the public, were not involved in the decision to adopt Common Core standards. Neither was the U.S. Congress. I have been working with others in the State to increase an awareness among our legislators and to get them involved.

### **Common Core is Unconstitutional...**

Providing fact after fact in an attempt to demonstrate beyond question the problem with Common Core and why I feel it needs to go, is second to its illegitimacy. Nationalized education standards should be considered unconstitutional under the 10th Amendment. The General Educational Provisions Act also prohibits federal overreach by prohibiting “any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States [from exercising] any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system, or over the selection of library resources, textbooks, or other printed or published instructional materials by any educational institution or school system. . . .”

Common Core severely limits local control of education. The standards are copyrighted by the CCSSO and NGA and licensed only to states. Federal dictates assure that 85% of academic standards in reading and math will strictly adhere to CC standards, leaving only 15% flexibility. With only 15% of the standards eligible to be altered by the local district, a state choosing to teach cursive writing instead of just the keyboarding mandated by CC would likely use up the entire 15% on this one change. Nationalized tests are more federal interference. These standardized tests will drive curriculum and textbooks.



For those who feel that perhaps nationalization is the only way to fix educational standards, I do not suppose that I'm going to change your perspective on this. I will say that it was never the intention for rule, in the U.S., to occur top down. What powers given to the Federal government were "delegated" by the people(us). A national standard reflects an idea that the citizens of individual states are unable to establish standards for themselves, that they are unable to determine for themselves what would prepare their citizens to be most successful, and adoption by the states suggest that the states no longer wish to exercise such freedoms. I cannot imagine that any of us feel that way. I do not feel that each state should conduct itself in a protected manner. On the contrary, we should be sharing information and experiences. However, the decision as to what to implement and how to implement should reside solely with the state. Assuming that states are also responsible for their economic well-being, a policy that seeks to make the state strong economically, to attract the best and brightest, and to thrive, will surely establish standards to achieve that end. The challenge we face is in getting the state to actually adopt such a policy and see itself as something more than a ward of the Federal government.

**We already know that our government has no manners when it comes to respecting privacy. The Common Core presents major concerns over potential invasion of Student and Family privacy.**

Common Core calls for unprecedented monitoring, collection, and sharing of private student and family information. The Obama administration made changes to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), changing and reinterpreting laws to allow personally identifiable information such as name, address, Social Security number, attendance, test scores, learning disabilities, and family information to be recorded and shared with other agencies. This information will be available not only to the government, but also to researchers and private companies. The Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation funded and developed the CC database system and recently turned it over to a nonprofit corporation called inBloom, established for the purpose of controlling the information. There are security risks involved in the collection and storage of students' data.

Parents and legislators were neither informed nor did they give permission for Common Core to allow private data about children to be collected and shared.

Looking at the State of CTs statutes on student data and privacy, holes exist that would allow for data to get into the wrong hands and no standards or policy exist, like with HIPPA for example, that would protect the information. Having been a database

developer for years, I can assure you that such standards and policies are the equivalent of paper tigers. They do nothing to protect.

Let us keep in mind that knowing whether our children meet local standards does not require expansive data systems and data sharing. It simply does not. Our children represent the next market, the next employee (not employer), the next group of constituents.

It should also be mentioned that Common Core will affect private schools and homeschoolers, not just in the materials available but that laws will be stretched to include them in the standards and the collection of personal data.

### **Higher Standards or Standards of Mediocrity?**

Proponents of Common Core standards claim they will graduate students to be career- and college-ready. It is their mantra. However, one of CC's creators, Dr. Jason Zimba, admitted in March 2010 at a meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that "college ready" means ready for a non-selective two-year community college, not a selective four-year institution. The minutes of that Massachusetts meeting read: "Mr. Zimba said the concept of college readiness is minimal and focuses on non-selective colleges."

The Common Core standards claim to provide "evidence-based rigorous content." In reality the mediocrity and deficiencies of Common Core standards, these standards which are not based on empirical evidence, are many and have been exposed by education experts.

Dr. Sandra Stotsky, the architect of Massachusetts' excellent education standards, sat on the English Language Arts committee for Common Core and refused to sign off on the CC standards, saying "they were not internationally benchmarked or research-based." She described them as empty skill sets that won't prepare students for authentic college course work, and said, "there is absolutely no empirical research to suggest that college readiness is promoted by informational or nonfiction reading in high school English classes or in mathematics and science classes."

Professor R. James Milgram of Stanford University, the only professional mathematician on the Common Core Validation Committee, also declined to sign off on the CC standards. He has spoken against the standards in several states and testified in Indiana:

The Common Core [math] standards claim to be “benchmarked against international standards” but this phrase is meaningless. They are actually two or more years behind international expectations by 8th grade, and only fall further behind as they talk about grades 8 – 12. Indeed, they don’t even fully cover the material in a solid geometry course, or in a second-year algebra course.

Since Common Core delays the teaching of algebra from 8th to 9th grade, it will be nearly impossible for graduating seniors to complete calculus, a required course for admission to many four-year universities.

### **Hey? How come there is no price tag on this?**

At a time when many states and school districts are struggling to stay afloat financially, Common Core demands that current textbooks be replaced with those aligned with the new standards, that teachers be retrained to teach in alignment with CC standards and CC standardized tests, and that schools fund technological updates necessary for every student to complete computerized testing, including purchasing additional computers and increasing broadband capacity.

Estimates to implement the standards and testing range from \$12 to \$16 billion. The fact that states cannot even figure out how much Common Core alignment will cost them is further evidence that they had no hand in developing the standards. Additionally, even if the local school districts get State or Federal grants, we must assume that the majority of those funds are being redistributed from tax payer money.

The Pioneer Institute report on “National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standards” estimates that, for just the testing mandated by the federal government, the “annual cost of assessment for states participating in the consortia will increase by a total of \$177.2 million each year. These are not one-time costs . . . , but ongoing operational costs that will be faced each year.” This estimate is an increase over previous standardized testing costs, not the full cost of the testing.

In another example, the Pioneer Institute estimates that California’s textbook and materials costs would be \$374 million. California’s previous standards were judged to be as good as, if not better than, Common Core standards, so this is money that did not need to be spent. Many California taxpayers are left wondering why they will be paying for this. While this is not Connecticut, it does paint a picture of the implementation of an agenda as opposed to anything that represents actual tangible improvements, logical decision making, or fiscal responsibility.

It doesn't go unnoticed by Common Core critics that Bill Gates, who makes computers, Sir Michael Barber's Pearson PLC, the multinational publishing and education conglomerate (and provider of Power School), and other education industry giants who are champions of Common Core will profit handsomely from its implementation.

### **Experts have weighed in on the future with Common Core...**

Dr. Ze'ev Wurman, a mathematics standards and assessment expert and former U.S. Department of Education official, states:

I believe Common Core marks the cessation of educational standards improvement in the United States. No state has any reason left to aspire for first-rate standards, as all states will be judged by the same mediocre national benchmark enforced by the federal government.

Moreover, there are organizations that have reasons to work for lower and less-demanding standards, specifically teachers unions and professional teacher organizations. While they may not admit it, they have a vested interest in lowering the accountability bar for their members. With Common Core, they have a single target to aim for, rather than 50 distributed ones. So give it some time and, as sunset follows sunrise, we will see even those mediocre standards being made less demanding. This will be done in the name of "critical thinking" and "21st-century" skills in faraway Washington, D.C., well beyond the reach of parents and most states and employers.

Christopher Tienken, Ed.D, the editor of the *Journal of Scholarship & Practice* in his article "An Example of Data-less Decision Making" (Winter 2011) offers another reason all Americans should worry about the potentially devastating impact of Common Core:

Children do not have a seat at the policy-making table. Policy is thrust upon them, not created with them. They are helpless to defend themselves against poor decision-making. They do not have a voice. They have only the voices of the adults who are supposed to know better.

If you want to know what prompted me to step-up, this is it. I asked the principal about CC and received no answer. I tried to ask both the PTA and Board of Education and received no answer. I did finally communicate with the Superintendent of Schools and presented him with the information I had gathered. The response I received explained what the town was doing to implement the Common Core and did not answer my specific questions.

I want to remind you that none of the sources of information above have the same financial stake as the State Dept of Education, as those behind the National Common Core web site, as PTA National (who has received over 1 Million from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), and others who provide a dreamy picture of Common Core and how good it is for our children and the nation. To date, I have also communicated with Senator Fasano and Representative Yaccarino. I have to yet hear whether they will join in this fight to regain local control over education.

Parents and Tax-Payers, we are the voices Dr. Tienken is talking about. If we do not stand here and reject Common Core, we will regret that decision.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

Well, as someone looking to get onto the Board of Education, I have yet to approach the education budget. I have obtained copies of the budget, but feel it would be necessary to view individual transaction detail in order to get a better feel for where and how the budget is spent.

That said, I believe that through exposure to not only content, but music, art, and physical education, children develop an appreciation for the expression of others and often a way to express themselves. They learn the value of team work, discipline, and find themselves by identifying the things they enjoy, may be naturally good at, and are willing to work hard to be better at.

I do not see music, art, and athletics as something to be sacrificed or to be used as bargaining tools. The day I entertain such a cut will be the day I've exhausted all other options and increased taxes is not one of those options.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

I believe that the current Board of Education is making an honest effort to keep our children safe without creating a martial environment. I do feel that, if the goal of these security measures is to prevent a deranged individual from performing a sinister act, then based upon the measures that I am aware have been implemented, the measures would not prevent that from occurring.

For those of us who do not realize that we cannot control everything in life, but rather our own actions and preparations, what I am going to say may come as a surprise. I do not believe that there exists a sum of money that we could spend that would protect our children with 100% certainty. Having two children in the system, that leaves me

feeling vulnerable, but no more vulnerable than when then they leave the house without me or with me for that matter.

I want to be clear. I do think security measures do make sense, but I think they serve a different sort of purpose and I am glad the current Board of Education has taken action.

If I were to try and make changes, I would seek measures to protect our school children from the inside out. I believe that our children deserve an environment in which to learn with eachother that is free from the disruption of behavioral issues that include a lack of respect for others. I believe that what we pay to provide the children of our town with a quality education is a privilege to be able to partake. I would be willing to vote for or support policy that seeks to protect the rights of those students who are willing and able to meet the basic expectations of student behavior and respect for others.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

So what does make North Haven schools great? For that matter, if I lived elsewhere, what would make that school system great? I don't believe for a second that North Haven is exceptional. Although, we certainly have some exceptional people. I believe that part of it is certainly the staff we hire. Yet, even before that, I think that great schools are the product of a community that is involved and takes the education of its children very seriously. Whether it was a North Haven with parents who viewed the education of their children as a means to something better than the opportunities they had or a North Haven whose now more affluent and well educated parents have high expectations for how their children are to be taught, the common thread is a dedication to exceptional education as a cornerstone of the town.

The opportunities to make our schools better require that we tax-payers are essentially embracing the idea of paying it forward by providing the children of this town with an education that with our input may produce citizens to be proud of. To that end, great educations do not tell our children what to think, but rather how to think. Great educations provide our children with historical context, an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, including the Constitution, and reject pre-processed views as education. I believe we have an opportunity to make North Haven schools even better by ensuring that we, the people of North Haven, have the final say in what and how our children are educated.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**Carole Franceschet**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I am Carole Franceschet. I currently serve on the BOE and have done so for the past five years. I am a retired educator with a BS in education and psychology and an MS in Early Childhood Education. I spent most of my teaching career here in North Haven. I feel qualified to serve as a BOE member for many reasons.

First, as a teacher, I have been a part of a profession for which I have always felt a great passion. I understand the day to day intricacies of what it means to be an educator; working closely with students, parents, and other educators on a daily basis with the ultimate goal of success for all involved.

As the mother of three North Haven graduates, I know what was important for my children's school experiences. All three are successful in their chosen careers; two chose trades and one went to college to become a teacher. I know how important it is for school to offer not only a path to college but also a path for those who choose a trade. I also have five grandchildren, now in grades 2, 5, and 8. Like the children of North Haven, my grandchildren are diverse in their learning needs, so I know the importance of ensuring that all children are provided with an excellent education that meets those needs. Knowing what I want for them guides me as I make decisions regarding Board policy.

My husband is a retired mechanical engineer. We have been members of the North Haven community for over forty years. We understand what it means to live on a fixed income, making me sensitive to the needs of our retired citizens when it comes to decisions that may involve an increase in taxes.

Finally, my leadership qualities enable me to take on the task of Board member with confidence. I am secretary of the Board as well as Chairperson of the Curriculum and Instruction Committee. I am corresponding secretary of DKG, an organization that involves both active and retired educators, and promotes and supports excellence in education.

I hope to continue to bring my passion for education and my lifelong experiences to my role as Board of Education member.

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

My first priority as a Board member would be school safety. I have always believed that children must feel comfortable and safe in a school classroom/environment before they can be open to learning. It troubles me that school, once thought of as a safe place to be, has now become a place where some children will be worried about their safety. I certainly know that partnering with our police department is important. As our experts, their job is to protect the community's safety. Asked by Dr. Cronin to walk through each of our buildings to identify areas that can be better secured, a police taskforce wrote up a comprehensive report to make school and town officials aware of where the school district needed to implement safety measures to keep school safety our highest priority. Though a plan is in place and thoughtful changes have been made, we know that we are not done yet. With the help of our First Selectman, our community, and our school officials, we must continue to focus our efforts in how to best serve and protect our students in a timely fashion.

My second priority would be to focus on parent engagement and increase communication between parents and schools. The success of a student must include not only the teacher and student but also, the parent or guardian who is just as important a player. This is especially true with the new evaluation system for teachers and administrators today because parent feedback will be rolled into this evaluation. Such methods as monthly newsletters, surveys, email blasts, workshops on current initiatives and Sunday evening calls from administrators to outline the week's activities enable parents to be more actively involved in and knowledgeable about their child's learning and school life.

**2. The word "parity" is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings—what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Parity means equality. It has a very important place in our district. As a fifth grade teacher, I worked daily with students who were at a developmental stage in their lives where being self-righteous often drove their decision making. I applauded that. What is offered to one student or group of students needs to be available for all students. Students look to the adults in their lives to treat them equitably and fairly. We, as Board members, write policies that are made to ensure that all our students are provided with equal learning opportunities whether it is academics, sports, the arts, or even field trips. It is also important to know that if a student were to move from one elementary school to another in our town, they could seamlessly continue with their schooling. Also, when students leave fifth grade and enter sixth, all should enter on a level playing field,



regardless of the sending school. Presentation of material may vary but the content and exposure should be the same. I have always believed in fair and equitable, and it is what all our students and families should be guaranteed.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes-if any- would you propose, and why?**

We all know and respect the fact that children learn in a variety of ways. As long as there is learning happening for a child, the manner in which the material is presented may vary. The Integrated Day offers a more Constructivist approach to learning. It surely involves problem solving and critical thinking skills. Projects, research, and much nonfiction reading driven by the interest of the child lends itself quite nicely to our new Common Core. Children in this setting have an opportunity to explore issues and topics that truly interest them and so are quite motivated. The Contemporary classroom, while more traditionally structured, also offers students projects, research opportunities, nonfiction reading. These students, too, work on problem solving and apply their critical thinking skills.

To determine the ideal setting for an individual child, one must ask the question, in which setting is the child more likely to flourish? Some children do better in the more structured setting of the Contemporary classroom. Others thrive in the Integrated Day setting that encourages student selection of topics, under the guidance of the teacher, to pique a child's curiosity. It is important to know the child. In my own personal experiences, as a mother of three very different children, I know that two of my children would have thrived in the Integrated Day setting. They were both self-motivators, responsible, and could attend to a task. My third child, equally as intelligent, needed the structure in order to learn. That structure enabled him to focus. The Contemporary setting was probably the best place for him. You as a parent must know your child to determine where the best setting for learning would be for him or her. As educators we know that there is not only one way to learn so I believe both classroom settings are valuable. It is wonderful that we can continue to offer both to the children of North Haven.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

We all know that there will always be differences of opinion. How those differences are approached is important. First, it is important to listen to the thinking on both sides of the issue. That would help to better understand why there is a difference of opinion. It is necessary to hear both sides in order to move forward. Next, I would review the superintendent's proposal to determine if the action is policy driven or state mandated.

Understanding this reasoning behind the action could help explain it to the dissenting person. If I believed in the merit of the decision made by the superintendent, I would then do my best to share that thinking with the person involved and very likely encourage that person to sit with the superintendent to openly discuss the issue in a timely fashion. If that person presented his or her thoughts, and I felt a point was well made, I wouldn't hesitate to bring that to the superintendent for further discussion. I respect a fellow Board members or a community member's perspective on an action and value his or her thinking, just as I do the superintendent's, and I strive to always get that across.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment-what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes-if any would you make to these structures?**

Communication is the key to a successful working relationship between the Board and the community, along with transparency. When there are to be changes made in our schools, bringing it to the public before it is finalized is important. When a change is proposed, we need to talk about it at PTA meetings, share it at an assembly of parents and guardians, and hold small discussion groups in the schools with interested parties. This allows for the sharing of thoughts and a better chance to understand the reasoning for a change or vote, and it says everyone's ideas are worthy of being heard, be it the superintendent's or parents'. Workshops, though they do not allow public comments, are an important part of the Board's process. I would encourage interested parties to be at those workshops. After a workshop, it is certainly permissible for thoughts and ideas to be submitted to the Board of Education or superintendent for consideration before a final decision is made. It is important for everyone to keep an open mind and to always be respectful even if not in agreement. Change is necessary to move forward and to make improvements, and gaining a better understanding before it happens makes it more easily accepted for all involved. With this in place, public comments would be heard before a vote is made.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

When Common Core State Standards became the new "buzz phrase" among educators and the community, I often heard discussions with a more negative connotation. Anything new involving education always piques my interest, even though I am retired. "Once a teacher always a teacher." It defines who you are.

I did some research and talked to those who were actually involved in implementing it in our school district. I know that it is national and that forty-five of the fifty states have bought into this new initiative. Common Core is a framework that in 2010 redefined what should be taught in our schools in the United States. The philosophy being that it would better prepare our students across the country for college and the workplace. In fact, not only would our graduating 12<sup>th</sup> graders be able to compete with other students state to state but also around the world. Teachers would be asked to teach fewer units but do a more in depth study. By doing this, higher order thinking skills would be emphasized and students would be asked to apply their basic knowledge to solve problems. We would get away from rote memorization. If students just memorize information without developing the ability to apply it to solve more challenging problems, I question whether real learning has happened. When students can apply new learning to a variety of challenges we can truly see what has been learned and students also understand why they learned it to begin with. The learning assessment to accompany Common Core, called the Smarter Balanced Assessment, was the next concern for many. Anything new can be daunting. All involved know we are in this together. New testing always has to be “tweaked.” That was so even with the CMT and CAPT tests when they were first introduced. If you go online, you can take a sample Smarter Balanced Assessment at any testing grade level in math or language arts. It is comforting to know that the test is designed to accommodate all children, all learners. It is as any test should be—a way to guide teaching. It is a window through which we see how and what children learned—where to reteach, where to move on, who needs more time to strengthen a skill, who is ready to move to the next level. The test will continue to be updated for improvement. That tells me that it is known that it is not perfect at this point. Parents should be reassured that these standards that make up the Common Core will prepare their children better for entering college or a career training program.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child’s development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

Music, art, and physical education are all important to a child’s development. We want our children to be well-rounded. In order to do this, children need exposure to not only the core academics, but these areas as well from early on in their school career. Addressing the academic needs alone is really only teaching one-fourth of a child. Meeting the social, emotional, and physical well-being of children teaches the whole child. Music, art, and physical education allow for the creativity a child possesses to shine through. As a matter of fact, brain research has shown that children exposed to music early on may help them perform better in math. Each of these areas can be another way to teach math, science, history or language arts, only through another venue. We know that every child has gifts. While not all children may be

mathematicians, for example, some may very well excel in the arts or sports. Every child should have the opportunity to explore a number of different areas to find his or her area of talent through their education. All of these diverse talents are important in our global society. Because of this, when budget time comes around, these are not areas I feel we can short change. They have an important place in the curricula we offer our children from the time they enter school.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

I believe that we have begun this very important process in creating an environment that keeps our children safe. Involving our police force in addressing this important issue, the experts in protection of all in our community, is a very important step in devising a plan for protecting our children while they are at school. A comprehensive report was presented to the district by the police after they walked through every school in North Haven. Locking all doors during the day, cameras strategically located in every school, staff provided with key cards to enter a building, and the careful monitoring of who enters our school buildings are all improvements over where we were before the school tragedy almost one year ago. A policeman or guard outside the building may be the better place for such person since we know, as was the case in the Nevada tragedy, a threat can happen outside the doors of schools just as much as within the building. Perhaps metal detectors and panic buttons would be added protection. However, I don't know every aspect of the plan that is in place presently and that may be the way it needs to be in order to best protect our children. We probably wouldn't want some perpetrator to know every part of our plan or it may lessen the effectiveness of this new plan.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

My husband and I did our homework when it came to deciding where we wanted to raise a family. An excellent school system was at the top of our list of priorities for making the decision. We have not been disappointed. Our three children all have successful careers and much of that is owed to the North Haven school system. I got to know the system even better when I returned to teaching in North Haven in the mid 1980s. I worked with a wonderful administration and taught with the best. I had the inside track, so to speak, of education in North Haven. Today as a grandparent, I am privy to the workings of three other school districts, two in Connecticut and one in Massachusetts. I want to take the best of the best and make sure it is incorporated into our system. Being on the Board motivates me to continually step back to assess the system and then create and vote on policies that move the system forward to be the best it can be for all students. I want the same opportunities my children had to

continue to be available to all students in North Haven. This forum, put together by the PTA, is evidence of the importance of parent presence in our school community. It gives parents the chance to know those who will be setting policies for their children. To be the best, to have students graduating from high school with the confidence in their ability to be successful in beginning college or a career, parents are key players along with good teaching and focused students. Providing opportunities for parents, teachers, and students to work toward the same goal is empowering for all involved. Without all the key players, success cannot happen. Participation on the part of Board members in the many wonderful happenings in our schools enables them to see what our children are offered. I know that when I attend the Art Show in the spring, I am always so impressed by the talent our students have. I know the wonderful teachers that help that talent to truly grow and blossom. It excites me to see the number of families that come to see and enjoy the work of those students. I listen to the young students in the jazz band and am moved by the enthusiasm they show. When I attended the recognition of the CAPT Scholars and Super CAPT Scholars, I couldn't believe the number of students on the stage. That says so much about the capabilities of our students and the dedication of our teachers to help them reach their potential. Parents are such an important part of that as well. Continuing to hire dedicated teachers, providing strong curricula, and holding events that encourage parent involvement will allow this wonderful school system to soar!

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**MATTHEW KERZNER**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I would like to thank the PTA for sponsoring this Roundtable Discussion at the North Haven High School.

My name is Matthew R. Kerzner and I am running for the Board of Education. My wife Carrie and I have been married for 16 years and she is a librarian at Hamden Public Library. We have two daughters, Ellie who is 9 years old and attends Ridge Rd Elementary and Jillian, who is almost 4 and will be attending Ridge Rd next September.

I was born and raised in Waterbury, CT and I am number 3 of 4 children. My dad was a business owner and pharmacist for over 40 years. My mother was a school teacher for over 30 years in the Waterbury School system.

I earned my Bachelor's degree in Industrial Organizational Psychology from Nichols College and I earned two Masters degrees- one in Industrial Organizational Psychology and a second in Labor Relations from the University of New Haven. I am a lifelong learner and have been an adjunct professor at the University of New Haven for the past 10 years in the MBA, MPA, and Labor Relations programs.

I have over 20 years of work experience in Operations and Human Resources. My work experience includes:

- 14 years at Stop and Shop in various management and HR positions
- 2 years as an HR executive at HealthBridge Management
- 5 Years at UTC/Sikorsky in Human Resources and Labor Relations
- I am currently the Human Resource Director at ChemWerth, Inc., an International Pharmaceutical company in Woodbridge, CT

I am uniquely qualified to continue North Haven's strong commitment to education.

I was appointed to the Board of Education in July 2012 and I currently sit on the Policy committee. My extensive work experience in labor relations was very instrumental in the teacher negotiations last year that helped create a win/win for both the teachers and the school district. I advised during the custodian negotiations as well.

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

A: My top priorities as a Board member are as follows:

- To continue and grow North Haven's history of strong academic and extracurricular activities, such as music, art, and sports programs.
- To make sure we have all the right tools in place for the administrators, teachers and students to be successful for the changes in the district, such as CORE, SEED (teacher evaluation), and the technology infrastructure in our schools.
- To provide Human Resource guidance and support regarding any personnel matters and labor relations guidance to both the Administrators, Dr. Cronin and his staff.
- To help resolve communication issues throughout the district. Parents and teachers need better communication in order to address the needs of the students. I want to continue to improve communication throughout the school system, K through 12.
- We must address the needs of our high risk schools, such as the reduced lunch/breakfast programs, to make sure all students are treated fairly, and equally we need to provide the right focus for our schools to be successful.

**2. The word "parity" is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

A: It is important for us to define the word "parity so we all can understand what it means. The definition of parity is - the quality or state of being equal or equivalent

Being on the board, I have an obligation to make sure all students benefit from the programs we offer, whether it be sports, music, art or other after school activities. I participated in getting feedback from the administrators and other BOE members to identify each school's strengths and areas of opportunity. We must start synergizing all our strengths to help reduce areas of weakness. I am impressed with all the teachers that I meet and appreciate the diverse backgrounds they bring to the job.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

A: My wife and I struggled with our decision as to which program our older daughter would attend. We decided to send her to the contemporary program. I am happy to say that my wife and I have been very pleased with our daughter's experience in the contemporary program. Contemporary does not mean inflexible and has given our daughter room to grow.

Since my appointment I have spoken to a multitude of parents whose children participate in the ID program. I am a supporter of the ID program. Currently in North Haven, we only have 2 of the 4 elementary schools which house the ID program and 2 of the school's students that want to participate have to be bused to Green Acres. I think if possible, we should offer it across the board to the other elementary schools as well. This goes back to the word parity. We have a proven track record of 4 decades of the ID program, and should consider this as a positive opportunity for the district. As a board member I want to focus attention on how ID students acclimate to the middle school and ensure this transition is as smooth as possible.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the Superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

A: As a BOE member we have an obligation to question the superintendent when he/she proposes ideas or wants to implement a program. There are times an individual BOE member disagrees with Dr. Cronin and has brought up these differences. All of us on the board need to understand what Dr. Cronin wants to do so we can be understood if we get questions from parents and teachers.

I might disagree with Dr. Cronin on some of these decisions but, the BOE does not do the superintendent's job but helps create the policy and procedures for the superintendent to work within these guidelines. It is very important that everyone understands what the role of the BOE members and that of the superintendent. The BOE members help set policies and procedures, and the superintendent works within the guidelines we set. The superintendent does have executive privileges, and can make management decisions at times, without full board approval or vote. For example, the BOE has voted to give Dr. Cronin the right to select and hire personnel for the district. Once the selection has been done, the BOE votes on the proposed hires. Also, if Dr. Cronin feels that moves need to be made in the District regarding staff, class assignments, and number of staff, he has the right to do this without board approval.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

A: Public comment is very important and has its place to help bring about issues that need to be addressed before items go for a vote.

Public comment is a right that is given to the public by the Board. It is very clear on the BOE website what the Public Participation is at the BOE Meetings. "All regular and special meetings of the Board shall be open to the public. Because the Board desires to



hear the viewpoints of citizens throughout the district, it shall offer suitable time at all meetings for citizens to be heard. However, Board meetings are conducted for the purpose of carrying out the business of the schools and therefore, are not public meeting but meetings held in public.” (NH BOE Website) I think the problem is with communication. The citizens at large are not aware of what is being discussed before a vote is brought to the table. I have been frustrated in the past with issues that have been brought up for a vote without enough discussion or data. Public comment is very important to have diverse information be brought up to the Board. When it comes to the budget workshops, we open these meetings to the public, without public comment, however the public has plenty of time to get their feedback to the board through their PTA and with direct contact with a Board member. The school administrators, teachers, parents, and even students need better communication to get information flowing to the Board. There are vehicles in place to facilitate this, such as the PTA and school websites to get the information out to the parents. Information is also available on the BOE website. One of the major problems that I have seen is that parents do not get involved until a vote has been made and people read about it in the newspaper or hear it on the soccer field.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

A: Common Core, from my understanding, aligns our school curriculum with what universities, colleges, and most work places expect from their future students and employees. Our students are put through a rigorous curriculum with content that strengthens higher-order thinking competencies and skills. This system has been researched and the evidence proves that this system of learning is very effective.

The Common Core was not developed by government officials sitting in a smoke filled room in the White House. It was developed by a large group of experts who are trying to bring parity to all students in our country in order to give them the best chance to learn and grow. Yes, it was funded and researched by the Bill Gates Foundation, but I do see it as a positive change that fits with our mission statement for the North Haven School District. Which is “ As a result of their experience in North Haven Public Schools, every student will acquire the skills necessary to meet the demand of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Connecticut is 1 of 46 states that have adopted the CORE. I am seeing my daughter first hand benefit from being challenged by the CORE curriculum. She is thinking deeper and is being stretched in a positive way due to the homework assignments given to her by her teacher. With any change there comes anxiety and we are seeing the anxiety level rise with the introduction of the Common Core. As time goes by and our teachers and parents work together, we will see that CORE is not an evil word.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

A: I think music, art and physical education is a major part of a child's development. As a child, I took piano lessons and played the trombone in the school band. Playing a musical instrument teaches patience, calms the mind, and also supports cognitive development. Art is extremely important to help students express themselves and to develop the creative side of their brain. Physical Education and the sports program in North Haven is a great way for students to develop team building, self-esteem, strength and concentration.

North Haven School system has a wonderful music, art and physical education program and assists any child who shows interest to participate. When I think of budgets, I always keep parity in mind, but I also have to weigh this with the other areas of education. I think students need music, art, and physical education and there is more in student development than just the classroom curriculum. Let me clear, I do not support a pay to play policy and would vote against any such proposal. There is no parity in pay to play.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

A: When it comes to our students and teachers safety we can never do enough. The BOE has worked closely with local law enforcement officials as well as Mike Freda's office to make sure we have the resources to start working toward making our schools safer. Funds have been given and the following has been done to date: ID Swipe machines to get into the buildings, buzzer systems at the front door to all schools, cameras in the schools that provide a live feed to the North Haven Police, a panic button system, and an extensive training on school lock down procedures.

I do not support armed teachers or administrators. I have a saying that I tell managers whom I have trained over the years, "You need to stay in your own swimming lane." Teachers need to concentrate their time on teaching our students and continuing their own professional development to continually succeed and improve.

If the citizens of North Haven want an armed presence at school, I support having armed police officers or special trained retired police officers, on school property. If present, these officers need to engage in a productive capacity to teach our kids about safety, bully prevention, and self-esteem. They must be active participants and role models in the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Programs that we currently have in our schools. No matter how people feel about the gun laws all of us who have

children in our school district want the peace of mind that our students will come home as safe as they left us in the morning.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

A: Carrie and I moved to North Haven in 2001. One of the major reasons why we chose to live in North Haven was the school system. The teachers and Administrators are outstanding. There are teachers from other towns who want to come into our system to teach. We have a great reputation and that reflects in our testing scores. I also am very impressed with PTA involvement, and this evening's roundtable event is a perfect example of that. I have seen schools come together to raise their voice to help bring about positive changes for their children.

I see a great opportunity to get better in the area of communication at all levels. We have made some strides in this area, but communication is a two way street. Teachers need to use the tools available such as the online portal to communicate homework assignments and student progress. More parents need to be proactive with communicating with the teachers and get involved in the PTA.

**In Closing**

I have been honored to serve on the BOE for over a year. I take this position very seriously and will continue to do so as a board member serving the teachers, parents, students, and citizens of North Haven. I bring my education, my 10+ years teaching experience, and multifaceted work experience to the Board. I am an out of the box thinker, and have a proven track record of solving complex problems. I can and will help the teachers, administrators, and the BOE central office on human resource matters that arises.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**DOROTHY LOGAN**

**INTRODUCTION/QUESTION:**

**Why do you feel qualified to serve as a BOE member?**

I am a 38 year resident of North Haven. My two adult children are second generation of Logans to go through the school system

I am a product of the state university system with an undergraduate degree in social welfare and master degrees in Community Psychology, Special Education and Educational Technology and Media.

I have just retired after twenty-six years teaching special needs students in all the North Haven Schools with the exception of the high school. I spent eight years at Montowese, 13 at the Middle School and my last year at Ridge Road.

I am currently employed as a work site coordinator/job coach for the Step Forward Program at Gateway Community College.

I had been involved in the NHEA, serving as their VP, Membership. I am still a member of the Human and Civil Rights Commission as a CEA retired member. I also serve on The ARC Board in Hamden, and am the town appointed consumer representative to the Regional Mental Health Board.

Having served on a variety of boards, I have learned the importance of working as a part of a team, learning when to listen and when to ask questions. I have plenty of opportunity to practice patience and tolerance. Patience to take the time to gather all the facts before making a decision or taking a stance. When working with a group, every member has the right to express their opinion and while their opinion may differ from mine it is just as important. Committee or board work is more efficient and effective if members work to build consensus, building bridges is easier than building walls.

I would like an opportunity to serve on the Board of Education as I have spent my career and now my retirement working with and advocating for students. I would welcome an opportunity to continuing this work in a new way - as a Board member.

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

My top priority as a Board member is to comply with Connecticut state statutes as to the duties of boards of education. Those duties include:

1. giving all the children of the school district as nearly equal advantages as may be practicable,
2. providing an appropriate learning environment for its students
3. which includes:
4. adequate instructional books, supplies, materials, equipment, staffing, facilities and technology,
5. equitable allocation of resources among its schools,
6. proper maintenance of facilities, and
7. a safe school setting; shall have charge of the schools of its respective school district

Another charge of Board of Education members is to to prescribe rules, policies and procedures. The Board has started a review and update of school policies, many policies have not been updated in the last ten years. In our ever changing world, the Board also needs to implement policies which include areas of technology and social media. Some policies, especially in the technology field need constant review to keep up with our ever changing world.

I would like to have an opportunity, as a Board member, to give input to needed the changes.

While there are other duties such as the evaluation of the superintendent and hiring of teachers, the charge that would be a big part of my focus would to build support and understanding of public education through communication of the district's mission to the public and of course, listening to the public - students, staff, parent and resident about their questions, concerns and ideas. A big part of this is to adopt, advocate for and oversee a school budget, which is responsive to district goals and meets the needs of all students. It is important to articulate the priorities of the budget and garner support with leads to the adoption of a budget that moves the district forward while keeping in my the real economic factors we all face.

Lastly, to communicate to the board and residents that I, if elected, would be one of nine members, who will continue working as a team with the superintendent and Central Office staff for the betterment of all the students in the district.

## **2. The word "parity" is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Traditionally, the word "parity" is often used in education with the terms "gender parity" which is he measure the relative access to education of males and females. When you look at the District policies section on the School system's website, you will find:

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C , 1681 et. Seq) prohibits sex discrimination in education and in employment. Title IX addresses equality in the following areas: Athletic/Extracurricular equality, Gender equality, Access to courses, Facility usage, and School Climate and more. The District's coordinator of Title IX is Jane Sanford.

The actual definition of the word parity means the state or condition of being equal which relates back to my answer to question one about the duties of the Board of Education is “giving all the children of the school district as nearly equal advantages as may be practicable and equitable allocation of resources among its schools.”

I support the Board’s decision to begin to review field trips across the district. I support the PTA Council’s bimonthly discussion as to the Cultural Arts events that are brought to the district. The PTAs are looking to provide good quality presentations while sharing costs so that more than one school will have the same experiences. I support the District’s hiring of a music teacher at Clintonville as the review the elementary music program. I support the practice of making a strong program equitable across the elementary schools by adding to the program as opposed to taking away from a school to make all equal. I have a keen interest in seeing that all related services are offered to students in need,

And lastly, speaking as a retired teacher, I support the upgrading of the technology infrastructure in every school but look to the future. When all the schools are modernized, it is important to look at district licenses for chosen software, such as common and popularly used applications such as Lexia Core5 and Clicker 6. It would also be beneficial to begin to think about BYOD policies - Bring your own device policies now as the district invests in laptops, iPads and other hand-held devices.

I believe that when students enter the Middle School, the sixth grade teachers are teaching a study body which has had access to the same programs, materials, services, activities so that instructional time is not spent in filling in academic gaps. The students from the four elementary schools should present as unified group and not that of four random groups of students with missing skills and/or background.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

The Integrated Day program has been in existence for more than forty years. It was founded on the several principals - children learn best when they are active, moving, communicating, sharing, manipulating concrete materials; they use all their senses engaging in real activities. Children are active and unique learners who want to learn and explore their environment. In the early 1990s, the Integrated Day Program expanded to Green Acres School. The ID program at Green Acres include students from Green Acres, Clintonville and Montowese Schools.

The Integrated Day program has had many students move through the program. There seems to be agreement that the ID program is not better than the Contemporary program, just different. It is also agreed that the ID program is funded at the same level as the Contemporary program. It is also agreed that some families prefer the ID program and some families prefer the Contemporary program. Even within families, one

child may do well in an ID program and another child may function better in a convention classroom.

As a special education teacher, supported children in both the Contemporary and ID programs

last year at Ridge Road. I do like the fact that the ID program provides for looping of teachers and multi-age groupings. I spent time in the ID program working with students during project time and observed students working well with their peers. I was equally comfortable in the Contemporary classrooms working with small rotating groups of students. There were times during the day, specifically during Math time when the class was engaged in calendar activities, it was very difficult to distinguish between the ID and Contemporary Programs.

At the end of the year, it was my understanding that when a K-1 ID teacher was transferred to the upper grade, her replacement was to be as the third K-1 ID. Sometime in August the decision was to have add a conventional kindergarten and an additional first grade giving rise to a rumor that the ID program would be phased out or ended. In speaking with several Board members and an one of the administrators, there seems to be no basis for the rumor.

I believe that the ID program should continue as it has served the students of North Haven well for many years and many families continue to enroll their children for this program. The ID program has changed over the years, just as the Contemporary program has. Both programs have changed to meet the challenges of addressing the Common Core Standards and the resulting assessments.

It may be beneficial for a task group, which may already be established, continue to discuss issues, concerns and future adjustments which may be necessary to help the ID program to continue to not only meet the challenges of the future but the possible expansion throughout the district.

#### **4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

Actually, this is a question which I do have experience as I questioned the proposed layoffs and involuntary transfers of special education teachers two and half years ago and was vocal about the proposal at the special town meeting.

At that time, my intention was to ask questions and register and articulate my disagreement in a passionate but respectful manner. At that time, I stated that of course, staff would abide by the decision that would ultimately be made.

If elected, as a board member, my actions would be the same. It would be important to listen to the superintendent, his reasoning and the facts which support his proposal. After listening to his recommendation, it would be imperative to ask questions, not only my questions but the questions of all nine board members and then listen to the

answers. If the superintendent's proposed actions directly impact students, it would be important to gather and listen to the input of both parents and staff as two way communication is so important

After all the information is gathered and shared, the board would discuss and then take a vote. Before the vote, I would communicate my stance of the issue and the reasoning, listen to my colleagues and try to build a consensus. At the end of the discussion, a vote would be taken if the proposal was an action item and I would graciously abide by the outcome of the vote.

I try very hard to operate with the belief that everyone needs to be heard, all facts collected and shared and a decision made with the understanding that, while one can be passionate one's beliefs, conversation should always be calm, civil and respectful. I would like to always act in a way that is that of a positive role model for students, in a way that would demonstrates the most effective manner in speaking with peers, parents and staff, and that manner is with great respect and dignity.

**5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

The current structure of public comment occurring at the end of each meeting is a long standing practice in North Haven. I looked on the District's website under BOE Documents and did not find any document that discusses public comments at meetings. I do realize that Board Policies and By-Laws are currently under revision and would be in favor of language that permit public comments being made at the beginning of each meeting. The Board of Selectmen's meetings changed their agenda to allow public comments at the beginning and I would like to see this happen at all town and school meetings.

For many years, Board of Education meetings began at 7:30 and just within the last two years moved to the earlier starting time of 7:00. I would be in favor of allowing public comments at the beginning of the meeting especially on all action items which are to be voted on that night. The board usually has the option of tabling a vote in order to obtain new information or for purposes of clarification is needed. The Board does need time to do the business before them so my suggestion is that comments given at the beginning of meeting are within a specified time limit and that everyone making comments are heard before participants are permitted to speak for a second time.

Although I have not attended a District Workshop recently, the workshops are usually poorly attended and I always thought this may due to the practice of not allowing residents to make comments or ask for clarifications about the budget. I am in favor of allowing comments at the District Workshops with the same parameters as allowed for



comments at Board meetings. I would encourage residents to begin or continue attending the district workshop. Residents can follow up with emails or phone calls to board members and Central Office staff after the workshops, whether or not public comments are allowed at the meetings.

In summary, within the last year, the Board of Education has focused on improving communication between the board and residents. To this end, permitting public comments at the beginning of Board meetings and at District Workshops, would further encourage residents and parents to participate in the education.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

The Common Core standards have been adopted by forty-five states. The purpose of the Common Core standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in order to prepare them for the real world. This also includes students who will continue their education in college and those who move into the trades. The intention is that all students will be prepared to function competitively in a global economy. Connecticut adopted the Common Core Standards in 2010 but there had been much discussion prior to the adoption that Connecticut was moving towards a national curriculum. Having the states adopt the Common Core, means that all students in a grade level are working on the same standards. This means that a student who moves to another school in town, in the state or to another state, will be able to continue their education without having to “play catch up” or spend classroom time being taught skills that had been taught in their previous school.

I would encourage parents to access a web site titled <http://www.corestandards.org> which is a guide to assist parents and teachers to understanding Common Core. Besides the mission statement, parents can actually read the English Language Arts and Math Standards by grade level. There is a section in the resources section that I found very informative: One link is Myths vs Facts and Frequently Asked Questions. When reviewing FAQs, I was reminded that the Common Core:

- Make expectations for students clear to parents, teachers, and the general public;
- Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the common core state standards that will replace the existing testing systems that too often are inconsistent, burdensome and confusing; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

The NEA today has just published an article titled 10 Things You Should Know About the Common Core

<http://neatoday.org/2013/10/16/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-common-core/>

which speaks to the benefits of the Common Core like the end of drill and kill practices, the better assurance of differentiated instruction and the promoting of cross curricular instruction.

I did have experience with the Common Core Standards during the last two years of my career. I wrote goals and objectives based on the English Language Arts and Math Standards. I found that the goals and objectives based on Common Core addressed the student learning more effectively than basing goals and objectives based on the CMTs.

Now, I do have to balance what I have just said with the reality of life in education today. Every day, I am reminded that the change to the Common Core Standards is providing additional anxiety to teachers, and a lot more paperwork, stress to parents as they learn the new vocabulary - students don't carry and borrow, they regroup after they learn how to decompose numbers! Parents are posting their observations that they are observing stress and anxiety in some of their children and I do believe them as I, too, witnessed an increased level of anxiety. I have also been witness to students beginning to take ownership of their learning and being able to articulate what they are learning and why it is importance. Lastly, it is my belief that it is imperative that the Board, staff and parents work together during his difficult and challenging time as we all adjust to the new ways of teaching and learning.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

As a student who was educated in the 1950s and 60s in Catholic schools, my experience with music, art and physical education was limited and looking back, although well intentioned was not of high quality.

I didn't realize on how much I missed out until my own children attended Green Acres school and were students of great, and extremely talented and skilled teachers, Jack Cafferty, Dave Yoder and Steve Radigan. My awareness of the value of the arts in schools increased as my children moved on to the Middle School and then High School. Being a teacher in the system, I also witnessed how strong our music and art programs are. I have repeatedly have said that my favorite day of the year is the day of Art Beat when the students, pre K through senior year have their work displayed. While I am there, I always listened to the drumming, singing and the various specific small instrumental groups.

There is much research and literature that give reasons why the arts are so important. Some of the reasons are:

1. They are languages that all people speak that cut across racial, cultural, social, barriers and enhance cultural appreciation and awareness.
2. They provide opportunities for self-expression
3. They develop both independence and collaboration.

4. They make it possible to use personal strengths in meaningful ways
5. They improve academic achievement -- enhancing test scores, attitudes, social skills, critical and creative thinking.
6. They exercise and develop higher order thinking skills
7. They provide the means for **every** student to learn.

Almost twenty years ago, a movie titled Mr. Holland's Opus dealt with a district which was cutting back their arts program due to reduced economic revenues Richard Dreyfuss gave a very moving testimony in about the importance of arts. Unfortunately, 20 years later we still have to deal with the issue on many local levels throughout the country. I think that we, as a district, need to ask the question "What can we afford?" but we also have the question "Can we really afford not to provide for students in the area of arts." Let's work together to continue to provide high quality instruction regardless of the economic times.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

Last year, the police and central office staff walked through every building and made recommendations on how to improve school safety. The district has received a 65 thousand dollar grant to offset the expense of installing new equipment. I do believe that swipe cards, security cameras and buzzer alarms are needed.

I would like to see every classroom and any room used for instruction to be equipped with locks which lock from the inside and not just from the hallway. All related and support staff, who often travel from room to room, and often with students, would have a key which will open the nearest door when a lockdown is announced.

It would be prudent to continue the practice of monthly fire drills, announced and unannounced and monthly lockdown drills. I would encourage drills to take place during different times of the day, such as lunch, recess in the elementary level, and going to, in and coming out of specials.

I hope that staff have become familiar with the surrounding neighborhoods and have predetermined areas in which to bring students, in an event of a lockdown when students would be outside and should not be brought back into the building.

I also remember when the time when DARE began in schools. The DARE officer would be in the building on a weekly basis, often eating in the cafeteria with the students and walking through the hallways. I am aware that policemen often drive by the schools and would suggest that the officers, if at all possible, stop and visit the schools on a random schedule.

A new middle school will be renovated and/or built and I would expect the building have the most up-to-date security measures/equipment.

Lastly, when one reads about each mass shooting from Columbine on, the common factor is a student or former student has committed these acts of violence on students and faculty of the schools that they have or are attending. While we can discuss the methods of keeping schools safe from outsiders, we need to look at the causes that have led students to acts of violence. We need to provide students with access to good and timely mental health services. To this end, I will continue to advocate for the reinstatement of full time social workers at the elementary level. Students in possession of good mental health bring joy to themselves, parents, school and community, not grief. Let us intercede with students as early as possible, when we have the best chance of making a difference.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

The North Haven school district has many strengths. It appears to be a fact that has been confirmed by many parents whether their child/children are about to attend, attending or have graduated. As I have canvassed the different neighborhoods, the reaction of satisfaction has been almost universal.

Some of the following are some of the attributes of the success of the school system.

The district recruits teachers that are multi skilled and talented. Just as importantly, the district retains these devoted, passionate and hard working teachers. This is equally as to true of the related services and support staff. The teachers will devoted to practicing and bettering their craft are as equally involved in the education and nurturing of the whole child.

The district has provided a strong arts program. We have many students who participated in chorus, band, theater and the visual arts. Some of them have gone on to perform professionally while others continue their involvement in the arts as leisure activities.

The district has provided, on the elementary level, a choice between the ID program and the Contemporary program. Students in all four elementary schools have the option of enrolling in the ID program, although a drawback is that admittance to the ID program is dependent on the number of students vying for a limited amount of spaces creating a lottery.

The PTA members are hard working and dedicated. As the teacher representative to PTA Council for more than ten years, I have a clear picture of all the work that goes on

behind the scenes, whether it be fundraising, selecting Cultural Arts program or working on programs like the one tonight.

North Haven has a new high school, although it is hard to believe that it will soon be ten years old. Within a few years, the district will have a new middle school, whatever the form is chosen.

We still have work to do to continue improving education in North Haven.

I see an opportunity for a clearer articulation of the budget and the budget process including input from parents, staff and residents. When referendum time rolls around in May, the public needs to have an understanding of the priorities of the district.

I do think we need to look at two areas: While the technology infrastructure needs important, I believe that we have not developed a clear understanding of the use and implementation of technology concerning iPads and other handheld devices, as well as assistive technology, whether be low tech, high tech or somewhere in the middle. Along with the acquisition of this technology is training that is required to implement and maintain its use.

I also think that we need to look at our ELL population. We have one teacher who services four elementary schools and teaches approximately thirty-four students for a total of an hour each per week.

And lastly, I have been vocal about my concern about the reduction of the full time elementary school social workers. They are between schools and have double the number of students to service. Last year, it often happened that the social worker was called to return to the other school, making it hard to see the students that were scheduled for the day. At the time of the reduction two years ago, the elementary school psychologists were changed - they were required to work one day a week at the high school. Mental health issues have come to the forefront in the last ten months. I do believe in early intervention and I found it very difficult to say to an upset student who wanted to speak with a social worker, whom they have bonded with and trust, " I know that you are upset but the social worker is out of the building today and will be back in two days, and the psychologist is not here either".

Let's work together to reinstate the elementary social workers - staff which help the students maintain positive mental health allowing to access learning.

**QUESTIONS FOR**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATES: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**RANDI PETERSEN**

**1. What would be your top priorities as a Board member, and why?**

North Haven Public Schools are currently facing many issues but one of the most prevalent is the financial implications of multiple items over the next few years. We have a middle school that is in need of significant repair or new construction, we have to improve multiple facets of technology in all schools, we have security precautions to update and implement, we have students with special needs requiring specific and individual learning tools, special transportation, etc., and the list goes on and on. At a time when budgets are tight and needs are many, it is necessary to carefully look at where our money is being spent, where we can save, and where we can spend the monies we do have in places that will make the biggest and most significant difference for as many students as possible.

This brings me to a second priority which is to continue to work to ensure a quality and consistent education for every student throughout the North Haven Public Schools. With a system of approximately 3300 students, over 400 educators and support staff, and a limited amount of funds, this is not an easy task. However, we will continue to support our teachers, administrators, and support staff in every way possible, through new and old initiatives, so they can do their jobs professionally, efficiently, and effectively.

A third priority is somewhat related to the issue of security. Keeping our children and educators learning and working in a safe environment does not begin or end with video cameras and walkie talkies. A very significant part of school safety includes the provision of necessary and appropriate mental health services our students may need. Whether a child is dealing with depression, the struggles that come with a broken home, or an unsteady relationship, he/she may need guidance and/or support. We should be able to provide such services and supports when they are needed and I hope to be able to increase and improve upon what we already have within our school system.

**2. The word “parity” is often mentioned at Board of Education meetings - - what does it mean to you, and what is its place in our district?**

Parity is equality. As a Board of Education member, I am always consciously aware of how decisions and discussions will affect our students, teachers, administrators, and staff. Creating a school system with parity throughout is not an easy task. Day after day our professionals work toward the same goal - to teach the necessary academic, social, and life skills our children need now and in the future. However, with a vast amount of opinions, approaches, and philosophies, it is often difficult to ensure the

same experiences, supports, and outcomes. As difficult as it may be, it is our job as the Board of Education to create and implement policies and procedures to ensure equal supports for our educators and support staff, as well as an equal education to every single one of our students.

It does not matter which of our four elementary schools a child attends. At the end of their fifth grade year, every one of our students should have had the same opportunities, experiences, and supports. This is without exception. The same applies for each of the teams of our middle school students, as well as every one of our high school students. Whether your neighborhood borders Hamden, Wallingford, North Branford, New Haven, or is right in the middle of North Haven, we each pay the same mill rate, therefore every one of our students has the right to the same education, experiences, and supports. No more and no less.

**3. For decades at the elementary school level, there have been two types of classrooms (Integrated Day and Contemporary). What is your view of these programs, what changes - - if any - - would you propose, and why?**

Children learn differently. With involvement and assistance from parents, our teachers will become sensitive to the different learning styles and interests of every student. This awareness allows our educators to teach to students' individual needs using the best and most effective methods and assessments. The North Haven Public School system is fortunate to be able to offer two distinct programs to its elementary school children: the Integrated Day Program and the Contemporary Program. While they are both successful, they have different educational philosophies. The Contemporary Program provides a more traditional approach to the delivery of instruction, most likely mirroring the style many of us experienced. The Integrated Day Program is an individualized, multidisciplinary program providing project-based instruction in multi-grade classrooms. Existing in North Haven for four decades, there are many benefits and positive outcomes of this unique program.

I am more familiar with the contemporary program because that is the program my husband and I felt was best for our daughter and is now best for our sons. However, some of my closest friends have their children in the ID program and are very happy with the education it provides and the experiences their children have had. As long as our students are learning what they need to learn and are being assessed in ways to best measure academic and social growth, I see no reason to make any drastic changes to either program. Just as I would like to see parity throughout the contemporary program, the same applies to the ID program. The Integrated Day program at Green Acres and Ridge Road should mirror each other, therefore providing the teachers and students in either school the same opportunities, experiences, supports, and outcomes. If this is not currently happening in the contemporary and ID, then this would be the only modification I would suggest for both programs.

**4. How will you as a board member handle differences of opinion with the superintendent's proposed action or strategy?**

The charge of the North Haven Board of Education is to help create and set policies and procedures, and to be sure the Superintendent of Schools works within the guidelines of such policies and procedures. The Superintendent of Schools ultimately makes the executive decisions when it comes to issues outside of policy and procedure. The Board relies on his knowledge of our school system, his education, and his professional experience to provide accurate information and guide the Board as to what would be best for each given situation.

During my time on the Board, not a single discussion or decision has been taken lightly. With each topic Dr. Cronin has brought to the Board, or vice versa, a meaningful discussion has taken place. One of the wonderful things about our present Board of Education is the diversity of experience each member brings to the table. Our current Board members have extensive backgrounds and experiences in business, human resources, student disability services, law, finance, regular education and special education throughout the K-12 years as well as in higher education.

We have worked very well together to make educated decisions in all aspects of our responsibilities as a Board. While we may not all always agree, we have a strong respect for each other and the unique and significant contributions we each bring to the table. We work together through respectful discussions to settle differences and arrive at solutions. We are a cohesive Board that diligently works to ultimately reach the same goal which is to provide the best education and experiences for every single one of our students.

- 5. Regarding the receipt of public comment and feedback, the current structure of Board meetings is public comment at the end after votes are made, and District Workshops have no place on their agendas for public comment - - what is your perspective on these structures, and what changes - - if any - - would you make to these structures?**

When I first moved to North Haven 13 years ago, the Board of Education ran its meetings very differently than it does today. Public comment was placed at the end of the meeting but it was rare for the Board to respond to any comments. Today, things are different. Communication and reciprocity of information occurs frequently. As chairperson of the Board of Education, Anita Anderson has worked to increase communication between administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and the community. While public comment is currently placed at the end of our monthly meetings, there have been occasions when Anita has offered the opportunity to meeting attendees to voice opinions and/or perspectives during discussion. For example, last spring we were trying to decide which days at the end of the school year should be shortened due to the extended calendar and the predicted hot weather. There were several teachers attending the meeting and Anita asked them for their input which helped us to make a better, more effective decision. Occasions such as this have happened before and I am sure they will happen again.



Currently, public comment takes place at the end of our meetings and guidelines allow for individuals to speak for three minutes to a topic on the agenda. However, this might not always be the most efficient or effective place for public comment. I value the perspective of those attending our monthly meetings and am open to changes in the current format as long as any modifications follow Roberts Rules of Order, which we are bound to follow. If you are interested in attending a meeting or are just curious about the topics to be discussed, all public meeting dates and agendas are placed on the North Haven Public School System website.

Every member on our current Board is open to communication and willing to discuss your concerns as deemed appropriate. Should you want to contact any or all BOE members you can find each of our email addresses on the North Haven Public School System website. At the last Board of Education meeting, each member was assigned a school for our Adopt-A-School program. Through this program each Board member attends various events held at our respective schools throughout the year so you may see us at your PTA meetings, family nights, or school performances. Additionally, many of us are parents of school age children and attend various school activities, as well as after school and athletic events. I think I can speak for all of us when I say please do not hesitate to contact or approach any one of us whether it be via email or in person if there is something you would like to discuss. We want to hear what you have to say and are here to listen.

**6. What is Common Core from your perspective, and what do you want parents to know about it?**

The Common Core is a real-world approach to learning and teaching. It was developed by education experts from 45 different states and adopted by the state of Connecticut in July of 2010. As a public school system in the state of Connecticut, we are required to implement the Common Core if we want to continue to receive the state funding we absolutely need to run our school system. The K-12 learning standards of the Common Core delve deeper into the key concepts of math and language arts. They require a practical, real-life application of knowledge that will prepare our students for success in college, work, and life. Elements of the Common core include consistent learning expectations for all students, clear standards that focus on understanding over memorization and an emphasis on critical topics students need to succeed after high school.

Personally, I have mixed feelings about standardized testing whether it is the CMT or the Common Core. There is much more to a child than their academic ability or what their scores on a standardized test may indicate.

The basis of the Common Core is high standards, and the establishment and implementation of high standards are a critical part of a rigorous curriculum. Of course we want to educate our children so they can be prepared for what their future brings. Of course we want our children to be able to compete locally as well as globally. Melinda McKenna and our curriculum committee have been working very hard to align our

curricula along with the Common Core state standards. Just as we want to see parity among our six schools, we should also expect parity across our country and ultimately on a global scale as well. I do not see anything wrong with raising the bar.

What do I want parents to know? I want them to know that as a public school system we are required to implement the Common Core standards and Smarter Balanced assessment system. I want them to know that as a Board we are doing everything we can to support our administrators, teachers, and students in what is going to be an enormous transition. I want them to know our teachers are going to continue to teach their students to the best of their ability. But most importantly, I want them to know we are aware that there is much more to your child than test scores and those are the things that cannot be measured because they are truly unique and immeasurable.

**7. How do you view the importance of music, art, and physical education to a child's development, and how is your view reflected in your approach to the education budget?**

Just as academics play a significant part in a child's education, so should music, art, physical education, and any other special interests contributing to the development of our students. One of the responsibilities of the Board of Education is to foster the varied interests of all of our students. Of course financial limitations may get in the way at times but we do the best we can with the funds we have available. Kristine Carling works very hard to save us money while also find us money through various state and federal grants.

As the budget season approaches it will be crucial for the Board to look at ways we are spending our money and to be sure we are spending it in the most efficient ways possible. We will work to equally benefit all of our students while also supporting all aspects of a child's education. Once again we will have many large ticket items in our budget this upcoming year such as transportation, special education, and technology just to name a few. If we had an unlimited amount of funds we would get the best of everything there is to offer our students and teachers, but of course this is not the case. Budget season was difficult last year and considering the economic status of our country as well as our state, I don't foresee this year being any easier. Frankly, with the new middle school project on the horizon, I feel it will be an even more difficult budgetary season. Everything will have to be considered and priorities will have to be established if our next educational budget is to be operational to its fullest extent.

**8. Do you believe that enough is being done to keep our children safe in school? If not, what improvements or changes would you make and why?**

On September 11, 2001, our country was shaken by a string of violent acts that changed the way many Americans feel about the security of our nation. Then, on December 14, 2013, the unspeakable occurred in our own backyard of Newtown, CT. Consequently, that day changed the way parents feel as they send their children off to a day of learning in a place expected to be safe and nurturing.

The North Haven Board of Education has been working with the North Haven Police Department to improve and increase the security in our schools. Such improvements include but are not limited to cameras at multiple school entrances which are directly connected to the NHPD and swipe cards allowing only staff to enter schools at main entrances. While some parents and community members would like to have our teachers and administrators armed with guns, I must say I do not support such a notion. However, I am open to further conversations regarding the placement of a trained, armed guard at each of our schools. While there is no guarantee the placement of an armed guard will be able to stop an attack, as evidenced in the Columbine shooting, he/she may be able to minimize the number of victims and casualties. Presently, I do not have enough information at this time to make such a decision.

With that said, for as much as I don't want to admit it, I have to think that if an individual is so mentally ill that he/she would even consider an attack on one of our schools, much less execute such a horrible act, there really is no amount of security equipment that will stop him or her. As we utilize the equipment we have been able to purchase with state grant money as well as money from the education and town budgets, we must also be proactive within the walls of our schools. Regular lock down drills must be practiced with a clear sense of importance but also with a high level of sensitivity as to not scare our students. Adults working in our schools must be consistently aware of safety procedures which have been adopted and actively involved in creating safe, secure, and nurturing environments in which our children can learn and our educators can teach.

**9. What is great about North Haven schools, and what opportunities do you see to make them even better?**

It is evident by the attention given to this year's election of Board of Education members that the people in this town take a serious interest in our public education system. Whether you are a life-long resident of North Haven or someone who has moved into North Haven for the reputation our school system has acquired through the years, you know we take the education of our children seriously. Our teachers and support staff are among the best in Connecticut; they are constantly learning new ways to educate our students more effectively. Our curriculum meets state mandates and its implementation will help our students become life-long learners and productive citizens who can continue to thrive into and throughout adulthood. Members of our community are taking an interest in our educational system, wanting to see our children succeed during and after their years in our schools. Our students are bright, talented, caring children and young adults who are sensitive to the needs of others and are continuously giving back to members of our community as well as causes affecting a broader population. Fostered by groups such as our PTAs, athletic teams, student organizations and clubs, our students collect canned foods for local food pantries, raise money for cancer research, and come together in the most difficult moments to support each other.

As time goes on and changes persist, we will continue to improve our schools and the education we can provide our students in any way possible. The future holds many exciting things for the public schools of North Haven. We look forward to new and improved technology for our students and teachers, a new middle school proposal and project, an improved curriculum which meets Connecticut's high state standards and gives our children the education and skills necessary to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.