

# **League of Women Voters of Teaneck Voters' Guide Board of Education 2018**

Our voters' guide questionnaire and letter of invitation to the Candidates' Night, co-sponsored by LWV Teaneck and Teaneck Council of Parents & Teachers, was mailed to each of the candidates for Teaneck Board of Education on August 27th. In addition to asking them about their Teaneck residency, occupation, education, family & community involvement, we asked each candidate to answer the following questions and to limit answers to a total of 500 words or less:

- 1. What is your position on state standardized testing, and what do you think are other appropriate ways to assess student progress?**
- 2. At what grade level do you think that Civics should be taught in our public schools? Do you have any ideas for getting Teaneck students more knowledgeable and involved in local, state, and national politics?**
- 3. How do you suggest we best help our students keep up with the changing technology that will so impact their future jobs and careers? What steps has the school system already accomplished and what challenges still exist in providing more instructionally supportive tools? IDENTIFY CONCRETE STEPS TO OVERCOME THOSE OBSTACLES.**

**The candidates' responses follow unedited, and are in the order received:**

## **Lisa Dash-Grimes, 838 Grange Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** Since 1998 – 20 years

**Occupation:** Director of University Staffing and Recruitment at Pace University

**Education:** Bachelor's Degree, Montclair State; Masters of Science in General Counseling, Pace University

**Family:** Married to Randall Grimes for 17 years. Mother of Melanie Eason age 26 and Dylan Grimes age 16

**Community Involvement:** Other than contributing to a few fundraisers here and there I do not have any record of community involvement. This would be my maiden voyage into local government and community involvement.

**1.** I am not an advocate of standardized testing. It is not clear to me that this process measures the total student. I do understand that standardized testing is believed by some to be a successful measurement of the effectiveness of teachers and school districts. I believe this to be invalid. When educators are preparing for the standardized testing period they spend much of class time teaching students to the test. This time is valuable and takes away from the opportunities to teach children curriculum that is not test dependent and will allow their natural capabilities and intellect to present itself. In place of standardized testing, I would encourage the individual testing of

students to measure learning styles, aptitude, personalities and emotional intelligence. The individual assessment of these areas especially at critical junctures in a child's education like kindergarten (beginning), 5<sup>th</sup> grade (entering middle school), 9<sup>th</sup> grade (entering high school) will give you a much greater understanding of who that child is, what kind of learner they are, and some of the personality and emotional pieces that can impact their ability to learn and to succeed.

**2.** Civics can be taught as young as kindergarten. By participating in pretend elections and/or voting on opportunities like who gets to take the attendance sheet to the office, children can receive exposure to Civics. Civics can be taught in small doses increasing every year with each grade. Getting students involved gets harder each year, because adults are less involved. I am largely starting this process now. My father was always politically and civically minded and urged me for years to become involved. I delayed direct involvement thinking that my focus should largely be on my career and family. I see now that my thinking was not fully developed in this area. I understand now that the civic mindedness of others is what gave me the ability to have a career and family. We largely live in a "me" generation and if we want our kids to be more civically minded we have to show them by example and help them understand that by helping the greater good, they are in fact helping themselves.

**3.** As we continue to move towards the future where jobs and processes once handled by humans are being phased out and handled by automation, the access to technology is critical. If we don't equip our students with advanced technology, they will fall greatly behind. The school district has started to tackle this problem by holding fundraisers towards technology. However, the problem largely lies in the lack of funding and the development of a plan on the effective ways to roll out, utilize and measure the success of technology in our schools. Two of the areas I am closely looking at are partnerships with technology providers as well as understanding the best practices of school districts who have mastered the technology piece with their students. Understanding the best practices of others, will allow us to create our own best practices.

## **Sarah Rappoport, 747 Mildred Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 32+

**Occupation:** Inveterate Volunteer/Homemaker

**Education:** Brown University, B.A. in American Civilization

Northwestern University, Kellogg Graduate School of Management,  
M.B.A. in Marketing and Finance

**Family:** Husband - Dan, Daughter - Rivka (THS 2011, Columbia U. 2015),  
Son - Isaac (THS 2013, Northwestern U. 2017)

### **Community Involvement:**

- Board of Education Trustee – August, 2012 – Present
- Teaneck Organization for Public Schools (TOPS) – Corresponding Secretary 2017-Present
- Occasional Tutor Math Adventures and Word Play – 2015-Present
- THS PTSO Recording Secretary – 2011/12
- THS Middle States Accreditation Committee – 2011/12

- Bergen County Office of Multicultural Affairs - Commissioner, 2005-2008
- Solomon Schechter, New Milford – Lunch Program Manager for Ahava (Parents' Organization) 2006 - 2009
- Received "2010 Community Service Award" by Teaneck Chamber of Commerce

**1.** Student assessments and hard data are always important in education. However, there has been over-reliance and misuse of PARCC test scores in New Jersey. Standardized test scores can be good measures of individual student and student cohort progress. Given the wide variations in student populations, both between districts and within a district, there should be a limit to their impact on teacher evaluations. Governor Murphy has taken appropriate measures to limit the influence of PARCC test scores over student and teacher evaluations, reducing the length of time spent in testing for younger learners, lessening the weight of test scores on teacher evaluations, and extending indefinitely the provision for other evaluations (SAT/ACT) to qualify a student for graduation. Finally, a statewide panel is being established to fully analyze the value/role of standardized testing in education.

Happily, these measures acknowledge that differentiated instruction and student/teacher interaction are the greatest contributors to student success. Keeping that in mind, standardized testing should be only one tool in evaluating student performance, augmented by teacher evaluations, work portfolios and other more holistic measures.

**2.** I believe that Civics should be an integral part of our educational program starting in PreK.

Several years back, at Bryant school, there was an election early in the school year. Students were given a choice to appoint a certain day (right before election day) as either “Crazy Hat Day” or “Pajama Day”. They went home wearing stickers that said “I voted. Now it’s your turn” and carried fliers notifying parents that “Pajama Day” won and the specific date. Parents were also given information on deadlines and resources for voting. How better to make democracy real and compelling for our youngest learners? And how better to involve parents in the learning process?

Civics is a subject that touches on the responsibility of citizenship in a democracy and empowerment. It is never too soon to begin instruction in an age appropriate manner.

**3.** I am proud that Teaneck has included a 1:1 technology initiative in the 2018/19 budget, providing a Chromebook for every student starting in Middle School. This decision entailed considerable debate. Specifically, I was concerned that our faculty had the tools and knowledge to maximize the benefits of the technology.

Several years ago, the district was required to purchase Chromebooks to meet the requirements of the state-mandated PARCC test, which is administered online. Having invested in the additional hardware, the district undertook to maximize its benefits, using Google Classroom and professional development.

The socioeconomics of our student population is another important factor in the decision to pursue 1:1 technology. Students qualifying for Free/Reduced lunch comprise over 40% of the population in four of our seven buildings. It is likely that the only access to technology many of these

students have will be in school or library. Goal 1 of the Teaneck Board of Education is to provide the “skills, knowledge and understanding to be successful global citizens in the twenty first century,” and in my view, this must include technological fluency and competence.

## **Gerald T. Reiner, Jr., 105 Bergen Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 2 years

**Occupation:** Director of Purchasing, County of Bergen  
Adjunct Instructor, Rutgers University Center for Government Services

**Education:** BS, Business Management, Thomas Edison State University

**Family:** My wife Desiree Ramos Reiner and I will celebrate our 9<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in January. We have two sons, Antonio Tomas, age 8, a student at Whittier School, and Alejandro Noah, age 5, a student at Bryant School.

### **Community Involvement:**

- Vice President, Teaneck Organization for Public Schools (TOPS)
- Volunteer, American Red Cross
- Volunteer, Friendship House
- Coach, Teaneck Southern Little League
- Coach, Teaneck Junior Soccer League
- Member, Bryant School PTO
- Member, Whittier School PTO
- GOTV Coordinator for Teaneck, BCDC

1. PARCC created a system where teachers felt pushed to ‘teach to the test.’ This environment needs to change. While some testing is necessary to provide a benchmark, future assessments should not carry as much weight in teacher evaluations and should take away less time from actual learning. In addition to PARCC, the role of the standard HSPT needs to be reviewed as well, to ensure alternatives are available for students to increase graduation rates. Other ways to measure our students’ success include projects, presentations, and portfolios. These would also prepare our students for college and graduate school level work expectations. We also should not discount the observations of our teachers – they see our students daily and watch them blossom throughout the school year.

2. I believe that it is never too early to introduce civics into our classrooms. In order to achieve the broader goals of engaging our children to the process we must implement a plan that not only brings into the classrooms elected officials, advocates, and experts, but also provides opportunities for our children to see civics in action. For example, in early grades, students can be introduced to our elected officials/government structures via books and inviting officials in to read to our students. As our children age, they should progressively be exposed to the higher levels of civic engagement by holding mock elections in schools yearly. Having students participate in a program where they spend the day in the life in our township or county officials to understand the day to day operations of government. The Board of Education can involve students more in its process as well. I propose we hold 2-4 meetings a year during the school day so that our students can see the board actions in person and have an opportunity to address their concerns about their schools.

3. Even as technology infiltrates more aspects of our lives, the basic skills of reading and writing are more important than ever. The latest technology without these basic skills diminishes the ability for our students to thrive. We must ensure our students have access to technology they need through the implementation of the 1 to 1 program. Our students must also be taught that it is important to be life time learners, both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. We should teach them to be curious and ask questions to be able to learn from one another and from people of all walks of life. We should create a partnership with FDU or BCCC to allow high school students to take college level computer science courses and to run a special weekend camp for students interested in coding. We need to lease our equipment so that we can keep our computers current every four years, so our students have access to the latest technology. We should create a speaker series featuring alumni and/or current Teaneck residents who work in technology related fields to expose students to the wide variety of careers that are possible.

### **Shahanaz Arjumand, 663 Chestnut Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 40+

**Occupation:** Management Consultant

**Education:**

- Masters in Health and Hospital Administration, Xavier University
- Bachelors in Economics, Rutgers University

**Family:** Blessed to have parents, one son, sister, nephew and niece who live in Teaneck.

All except my parents are Teaneck Alumni

**Community Involvement:**

- Teaneck Board of Education Advisory Council Task Force
- Teaneck Youth Advisory Board – Adult Advisor
- Habitat for Humanity
- Congenital Heart Disease Coalition
- Gilda's Club

1. Across the world there is some type of standardized test for admission into college, but they may not be annual. While standardized testing at grade levels has well known problems, positives include removing subjectivity, providing guidelines for curriculum and identifying areas for additional development. However, each child learns differently and at his/her own pace. If testing dictates how a teacher teaches, the ability to educate each child in the most effective manner can be minimized. There are two ways that student progress can be monitored

- a. Teachers for each department can collaborate to create one common exam that they will use to monitor student progress each year. The benefit of common exam is that it will test on the curriculum taught at the school at their grade level.
- b. Portfolios and participation should be part of overall methods of assessment.

Portfolios

don't just limit assessment to test score. They include projects, arts, collaboration efforts, use of technology to allow an overall assessment.

2. Let's start our children's civic education when they begin school. Voting and being part of a student government can be developed early both at Bryant and the elementary schools. Children in

this age group are eager to understand the connections between why and how things happen that impact their lives. For example, learning about the environment can help them be part of the larger world. As students move into middle school, we should consider developing a Junior Youth Advisory Board using the model already in existence at the High School. The model elections in the middle schools based on the national ticket, are always an exciting part of their education.

3. The 2018/19 budget provides a Chromebook for each student in middle school. The American College Testing program has identified the importance of having access to more than one electronic device for academic achievement. Studies over the years have identified socio-economics as the single most important issue in predicting academic success. In 4 out of 7 school buildings over 40% of our student body receive free/reduced lunch and many report having access to WiFi only in school or at the library. This 1:1 technology initiative begins to address this academic success gap.

Following are some additional steps we need to take to make digital classrooms be part of students overall academic success:

- a. Invest in professional development to ensure we have technological competency and maximize the use of existing technology.
- b. Integrate technology in an effective way to engage students of all learning styles.
- c. Empower students to use technology to collaborate for higher level thinking.
- d. Further develop project-based models of curriculum that incorporate technology.

The use of technology can enhance learning and prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century collaboration.

## **Victoria Fisher, 628 George Street**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 28 Years

**Occupation:** Research Scientist; Union Representative

**Education:** Teaneck High School Class of 2000; BA Douglas College, Rutgers University; Masters in Public Administration, Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration

**Family:** Husband, Gregory Bimbiras; Son Theodore

### **Community Involvement:**

- Trustee, Teaneck Board of Education
- Vice-Chair, Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee
- Chairperson, Teaneck Municipal Alliance Against Substance Abuse
- Delegate, Bergen Central Labor Council
- Girl Scouts of Bergen County
- Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains
- Friends of County Animal Shelters
- NJ Communities United
- NJ Working Families
- NJ PIRG
- March of Dimes

- Hudson County Court Appointed Special Advocate for children

1. Standardized testing has become a costly and overly political process. The recent emphasis on standardized testing has been criticized by students, teachers, parents and government officials. We all agree that students should be spending their school days experimenting, reading, and learning, not taking standardized tests. I have not seen any evidence that standardized test scores are a reliable indicator of our students' potential or our teachers' performances. I have opposed using test results for teacher evaluation, school funding, student placements or school closings. I have supported parents' rights to opt out of state standardized tests.

My preference is to have a reduction of standardized testing, as proposed by Governor Murphy, and instead collect performance measurements from multiple sources for a whole-child progress check. Our children are far more than test scores. Reducing them to numbers serves absolutely no good purpose.

2. I firmly believe that we must prepare our children to become national and global citizens. This requires an understanding of how the world and government work, how to shape them, and the development of skills and understanding to effectively advocate for oneself and others. We learn our place in the world very early in life, and so it is important that civics begins as soon as our students walk through the doors. This includes consensus building and democratic decision-making, which, typically, is first learned through play. As our students move through their education, civics should become an increasingly formal part of the curriculum, from history lessons, to literature, to language.

During the past Presidential election, I advocated (unsuccessfully) to keep the schools open during polling, because I believe in the importance of being a part of the process. Additionally, I encouraged a formal "Morning After" discussion in homerooms, where teachers could facilitate conversations about the election and help students process the results. If we want responsible citizens, we must help create a sense of responsibility.

3. Teaneck must prepare our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. The modern workforce is expected to work collaboratively and to be adaptable. These are not lessons learned from a computer program; these are lessons taught by committed and highly-trained teachers. We must continue to support our teachers through professional development, soliciting input and providing the technological tools they need for their students. While technology has already been introduced into our classrooms, and a 1:1 Computer rollout is funded and in the works, I propose to establish a working group with the Board of Education, PTO and the TTEA to identify the specific technological upgrades and tools that would best benefit our students, as well as to explore funding sources for those tools and any training needed to implement and teach the new technologies.

# **BOARD OF EDUCATION ELECTION DAY**

**Tuesday, November 6th  
Polls Open 6AM to 8PM**

## **DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**

*This Voters Guide has been prepared by the League of Women Voters of Teaneck, a nonpartisan group of local residents assuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote. Our organization provides opportunities for voter registration each year, works to improve our government; studies local, state and national issues, and strives to engage all citizens in the civic decisions that could impact their lives.*