

# **League of Women Voters of Teaneck Voters' Guide Board of Education 2020**

Our voters' guide questionnaire and letter of invitation to the Candidates' Forum, sponsored by LWV Teaneck, was mailed to each of the candidates for Teaneck Board of Education in early September. 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. Parents, teachers and students have been divided over in-person schooling versus the efficacy of remote learning this year. Please give examples of what has worked well, what needs improvement and specific suggestions for additional learning opportunities?**
- 2. How do you recommend our schools engage families in a virtual learning environment?**
- 3. Detail your attendance at BOE meetings pre-Covid as well as the virtual meetings since April. How familiar are you with Teaneck BOE responsibilities and proceedings? What skills and knowledge will you bring to the BOE?**

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

## **Danielle Gee, 83 Cranford Place**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 7

**Occupation:** Chief of Staff, Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

**Education:** Princeton – A.B, Public and International Affairs; Harvard - MBA

**Family:** Husband: Quron Gee; Sons: Parker – 8, Logan – 6 and Kentaro – 1 (on 10/1)

**Community Involvement:**

- Bryant PTO Corporate Fundraising Chair
- Whittier PTO, past Co-President, current Treasurer
- Beyond Diversity Committee – current member

**1.** As the parent of two children at Whittier School, I have experienced first-hand, remote learning in Teaneck. On the positive side:

- a) Students and teachers are home, healthy and safe, minimizing the risk of pandemic spread.
- b) The lesson structure which evolved from asynchronous lessons in the spring, to live, synchronous lessons in the fall, has been exponentially more effective.
- c) Children have greatly improved their technology navigation skills.

Conversely, there have been significant challenges with remote learning:

- a) Students with special needs, early learners and students' whose parents must leave home to work, lack adequate support and are at risk of falling behind.
- b) Virtual learners struggle to remain on task and are easily distracted.
- c) Large group classes are difficult to operate virtually and lessons are easily derailed by unfocused students.
- d) Technology problems are rampant with teachers, parents and students struggling to navigate the Google classroom platform and manage unpredictable tech glitches.
- e) Long hours of screen time may have lasting physical and psychological effects on children.
- f) The social-emotional learning and relationship-building that is a vital part of the school experience is very difficult to achieve remotely.

To address these challenges, I would advise that the district consider in-person learning for early learners and students in special education, implementing the necessary precautions to minimize the risk of pandemic spread. Identify teachers who are low risk for severe COVID19 outcomes (both themselves and their family members) to minimize their safety concerns as well. As a supplement, the district could help facilitate the creation of small family pods within the community to mimic the feel of in-person learning in a low health-risk environment.

**2.** For students with special needs and early learners, schools should engage with families by urgently establishing a safe in-person learning environment. While I understand concerns for the health of our district's constituents, I fear that the long-term impact, on these most at-risk students, needs to be considered. For all other students, frequent communication, between parents, teachers and students will be key to ensure that children are progressing appropriately. In addition, administrators and teachers need to be flexible and nimble in the development of the curriculum/ lesson plans as they continuously incorporate feedback from families/ students and other learnings, adapting to accommodate the needs of virtual learners.

**3.** Before COVID19, I often joined BOE meetings to advocate for my children and the Whittier School community as a PTO leader. Since COVID19, I have attended almost every virtual BOE meeting. I am familiar with the BOE responsibilities and proceedings, having met all current board members and attended most meetings. I also have 8 years of experience working with non-profit boards in my professional career. As a Teaneck mom, ex-investment banker and current non-profit executive, I bring a unique viewpoint to the board. As a parent, I have direct line of sight into the impact of policy decisions on students and my professional experience provides the analytical skills necessary to contribute to strategic and financial decision-making.

## **Katherine Houghton-Zatz, 146 Cherry Lane**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 23

**Occupation:** University Dean, Board Member, and Education Consultant (semi-retired)

**Education:** Teachers College – Columbia University, M.A., Ed.M., Ed.D.  
 Macalester College B.A. History, Certified Secondary Education  
 School Business Administrator License – CE, NJ  
 Institute of Education Management – Harvard School of Education  
 Board Governance – Wharton School of Management  
 Human Resource Management – eCornell – Cornell University

**Family:** David A. Zatz, Ph.D. Organizational Psychology, writer and adjunct faculty at FDU School of Public and Global Affairs

Zoe H Zatz – B.S., M.S, Rensselaer Polytechnic, former member Teaneck Youth Advisory Board, “graduate” of Camp K, Girl Scouts, Bergen Academies, Teterboro (Automotive Engineering). Currently a law student at Albany Law School

Avi (Benjamin) Zatz, graduate of Bergen Academies Hackensack (Engineering). Currently a student at the University of Vermont.

### **Community Involvement:**

- Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey from 2005 on.
- Boy Scouts – Cubmaster for Teaneck Pack 172
- Teaneck Community Charter School board member 2007-2012 (Vice Chair)
- Temple Emeth – annual bazaar volunteer (various years)
- Broadway Community Lunch Program (soup kitchen): Co-founder. Volunteer, 1984 – 2012, including positions as Director, Board Member, and Advisory Board Member.

**1.** The district should be commended for communicating with families and holding online sessions by grade level. This needs to continue at the school and class level.

We should be working on a plan for getting back to in-person instruction, and to have students whose IEP requires individual therapy to receive those services in person. If we can't bring them to the school, we should try to get our services to the students. Some districts have used refitted buses and vans to make home visits.

The amount of online instruction time students can handle is related to age, and our policies should be developed accordingly.

Meeting students' educational needs must remain our first priority. I do not agree with the decision to reinstate varsity sports before in-person instruction; it doesn't align with our primary mission, especially with our constrained budgets.

2. We need continued professional development for teaching online. We also need to evaluate providers to ensure that what we are using is working for us, and to see whether there are more effective options.

We have students who are testing at a rate of 30% proficiency for their grade level. Online delivery alone will likely hurt their proficiency further. We need to prioritize getting these students (in elementary and middle school) back to in-person classes and come up with a more general phase-in plan for in-person teaching.

The Online Learning Consortium has a variety of best practices and training materials which can help to increase engagement. For example, in a normal back-to-school night, we may have parents walk through the schedule of their child. Similarly, we need to use the training modules that come with our platforms to have parents go through simulations of the platforms. We also need to provide support services to parents.

3. Pre-COVID, as the Assistant Dean in FDU's Petrocelli College, I worked on developing the dual enrollment program and pre-college program for Teaneck High School students. Dual enrollment enables our students to gain college credits while still in high school; we could extend this program so students could finish an Associates degree as they graduate high school. To answer more directly, like others in Teaneck, I have intermittently watched BOE meetings and read the minutes. Since COVID, I have watched meetings online.

I have prior experience as a school board member in New Jersey, completing annual trainings, negotiating union contracts, attending the School Board Association meetings, and serving as vice chair of the board. I have also served on the Board of Calvert Education and still serve on the board of American Public University.

More information is at [kate4teaneck.com](http://kate4teaneck.com) and [drkatezatz.com](http://drkatezatz.com)

## **Damen Cooper, 1176 Windsor Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 24 years (raised in Teaneck, THS graduate; moved back in 2019)

**Occupation:** 22 year Educator

**Education:** Bachelors, MA in Special Education and MA in Administration

**Family:** Wife and 2 kids (5th grader at Ben Franklin and 3rd grader at Whittier)

**Community Involvement:**

- Former Teaneck Public Employee
- Former Teaneck High School Football Coach
- Former Teaneck High School Track Coach
- Former Red Devil Football Coach (volunteer)
- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Kappa Theta Lambda Chapter

1. Teachers are not trained to teach remotely. When in-person instruction stopped last school year, we as educators left work without a platform on how to proceed. Teachers have been given more training and are providing live instruction for students. Although this is not optimal,

teachers are trying and doing better than they were last year. Teachers can still use more PD on virtual instruction. The district can also explore ways to infuse more social emotional learning activities.

2. Create opportunities for dialogue with families and kids

3. I am a product of the Teaneck Public School system (Emerson, Ben Franklin and Teaneck High School, 1991) and a 22 year educator. I have been a special education teacher, special education supervisor, state monitor of the NJDOE, assistant principal, principal and central office administrator. I am an educator. I bring my experience and knowledge in school district policies, procedures, and curriculum and instruction.

## **Clara Williams, 21 Stuyvesant Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 50+ years

**Occupation:** Accountant

**Education:** Master of Administrative Science, Fairleigh Dickinson University

BS in Accounting, New York University

Diploma: Teaneck High School

New Jersey School Board Association Certifications;

- Certified Board Leader
- Master Board Member
- Certified Board Member
- Group Leader, New Board Member Orientation

**Family:** Married to Gilbert R. Williams. Two adult sons, Omari and Justin

**Record of Community Involvement:**

- Vice President, Teaneck School Board, member since 2011
- Board of Director(Alt) New Jersey School Board Association(NJSBA), elected May 2020
- Member, NJSBA Finance Committee
- Member, NJSBA Resolution Sub-Committee
- Former Member, NJSBA Legislative Committee for District 37, appointed
- Former VP for Legislation , Bergen County School Boards Association
- Member, The Bergen County Martin Luther King Monument Committee
- Member, Martin Luther King Birthday Committee
- Member, Advisory Board of Community Relations - Teaneck Township
- Member, NAACP

1. Since the pandemic, the Teaneck school district has rapidly adjusted to online learning for our students from Pre-K through High School including special need students. Online learning is not new, for decades many of our educators have acquired advanced degrees through online learning. However, our newest challenge is remote learning in the primary and grade schools. Positive outcomes of being thrust into this situation are:

- All children now have access to technology tools and needed resources. Giving students a more equitable and better educational opportunity.

- The students can benefit from the remote learning because they have more freedom to expand and explore in their own environment.
- Remote learning has provided a more supportive role for deferential learning to our students.
- I believe that remote learning interactive activities are the most effective lessons for our students and teachers. It can provide immediate feedback for the teachers to identify and address the needs and abilities of their students.

2. We need to have parent resources available as well as to make it safe for our teachers, students and families to interact effectively and safely in our schools or using a hybrid model.

Increase the level of support with parent classes on how to operate in a digital world. Increase the level of technical support to the district families. We need to provide virtual professional development for our families through our community education program.

3. As a board member, I have honored my commitment to attend Teaneck School Board workshops and regular meetings with consistency. In addition, I regularly attend meetings of the board committees and liaison, Bergen County School Board Association, and New Jersey School Board Association (NJSBA) meetings in Trenton.

For the past four years, I have served as a group instructor at the new school board member orientation. New members are instructed as to their responsibilities and board proceedings.

A few of the areas covered are:

Data-informed decision making

Ethics

Board member roles

Who makes the decision Superintendent or the Board?

I have been able to develop working relationships with the school board community, state legislators and advocacy groups throughout the state of New Jersey. Recently the funding for the youth mental health program was cut from the state budget and "The Forum" was scheduled to end in Teaneck. A board colleague and I drafted a resolution requesting the restoration of funding which the Board unanimously passed. Working in tandem with our state legislators, other school districts and various advocacy groups, we were able to get the funding restored. Teaneck's efforts contributed significantly in saving the program.

## **Yusra Subhani, 265 Fycke Lane**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 19 years

**Occupation:** Student

**Education:** 2019 Graduate of Teaneck High; Current Student at Bergen Community College

**Family:** I have an older brother and sister who are Teaneck HS Alumni and a younger sister who is currently a student at Teaneck High School.

**Record of Community Involvement:**

\* Member of the Beyond Diversity Committee

- \* Participation on Youth Panel in Town Hall Racism Demands Action in Law Enforcement
- \* Moderator in Town Hall Racism Demands Action in Education
- \* Captain of the Teaneck High School's Fencing Team
- \* President of Teaneck High School's Asian Student Union

**1.** We are living in very challenging circumstances that require us to make difficult decisions. Teaneck knows that the risks are high and the recent rise in cases is a reason for caution. Parents are feeling a need to provide additional help with schoolwork. Students learn differently and some may find the virtual classroom challenging. All of these challenges require us to look at our education system differently. I believe some students could benefit from an optional hybrid model with virtual and classroom training. This allows parents an option to send children to school for part of the week. With the hybrid model, we can provide in-person instruction and do our best at keeping students safe. We could learn and leverage any best practices from districts that have adopted the hybrid model. At the same time, I understand the fears of the faculty. This also needs to be addressed where proper PPE is provided for those who choose to participate in the hybrid model.

**2.** I think having parents join their own Google classroom with updates about assignments, topics, and tests for their children will help. I also think recording lectures would benefit families as they can view and assist their students with their assignments. Additionally, the school should have a 'Parent University' resource that allows parents to engage and be a partner in their child's education. We can learn from other districts who already have this program and apply it to Teaneck. Recently Broward schools parent university ([browardschools.com/parentuniversity](http://browardschools.com/parentuniversity)) was featured in the news and is worth considering.

**3.** I have participated in Board meetings in person and virtually. A couple of years ago, I raised the issue at the Board meeting about students paying for AP tests upfront. This is hard on families as test fees can be up to \$400. Also, the school reimburses the fee for those who score 3 and above. This hinders students from taking the tests. For those students who take the tests, fee reimbursement is a hassle and takes several months. About 10 years ago, students did not have to pay for the test fees. I am concerned that there may be students who are not taking tests because of the fees and score requirements for reimbursement. In the recent BOE meetings, I am very concerned about losing the Forum as it is a great resource for many students. I am also disappointed that after school programs are not being reconsidered since they can be virtual. I have the most recent and in-depth knowledge and experience of student and family's experience with the Teaneck public schools. I know how the policies and decisions made by the board impact the students and families. I bring a unique perspective and insights which would add value to the school board.

## **Harold K. Clark, Sr, 33 Amsterdam Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 29 years

**Occupation:** Retired Teaneck Police detective

Currently self-employed building-contractor: Building property owner/landlord

**Education:** Montclair State University/Industrial Studies

**Family:** Married with two sons

**Record of Community Involvement:**

- Teaneck Junior Football Vice President
- Retired THS Head Football Coach
- Panelist, Bergen County Community Building Partnership between youth and law enforcement
- Panelist, Bergen County Community College Youth Empowerment through Academics & Sports
- Community Police Officer volunteer/homeowner safety

**1.** At this point of the process it's difficult to evaluate what has worked to help our students achieve success. There are areas of improvement that need to be explored especially for our students of special needs. We need to discuss a safe and logical way of having those students enter our buildings so that these students can receive that necessary attention they need to achieve their educational requirements. Remote learning is an unfortunate situation but a reasonable solution at this point during this pandemic.

**2.** Our district should explore sending parents an information flow chart showing step by step instructions that can assist them with assuring that their child has a grasp on remote learning. Also having a teacher available to answer questions during school hours by phone or email.

**3.** As the father of 2 sons who attended 1-12 in our school district, I have been following our board meetings for the past twelve years, especially when my son Aaron was on the board of education as a student liaison. BOE responsibilities and proceedings are skills that I am becoming more familiar with during this process. My skills in managing and working with groups are some of my strengths which will assist me with making good critical decisions. My skills of understanding students is part of what pushed my desire to be part of a group of people who can assist with helping every student reach their goals.

## **ELECTION DAY**

### **Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**LWV Candidates Forum, Monday Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> (ZOOM)**

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_U\\_SwViTvRH--a6W2cbcEaQ](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_U_SwViTvRH--a6W2cbcEaQ)

*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.*