



STAMFORD EDUCATION ASSOCIATION POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE BOARD OF EDUCATION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Stamford Education Association sent out a questionnaire to all Board of Education candidates.

These responses were used to create the Candidates Report Card.

The information below reflects the responding candidates' answers to the questions posed in the questionnaire. This information is intended to provide a synopsis of the issues our district is facing and, in no way, is intended to be a complete representation of a candidate's full thoughts on the issues.

Our community deserves to have board members who will respect its staff, as well as promote a quality education experience for our children and our community's school. We are grateful to the candidates who took the time to engage with and respond to district stakeholders.

1. Why are you interested in being elected to the Board of Education?

"I'm running for the Board of Education because I believe our teachers and students deserve a school system that works for them. Having firsthand experience with the complex challenges facing Stamford Public Schools, I bring both academic training and professional experience in Public Administration, giving me the tools to evaluate policies thoughtfully and make data-driven, responsible decisions. As a proud graduate of Stamford Public Schools (K-12) and lifelong resident of Stamford, I understand the opportunities and challenges within our system. My commitment is to improve communication and rebuild trust between the BOE, parents, teachers, and students. By listening, being transparent, and keeping our community engaged, we can make decisions that truly put teachers and students first."

– Dennis LoDolce

"This is a pivotal year for the Board of Education, particularly with the search for a new superintendent. As a parent of three children at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Stamford Public Schools, I bring that perspective and direct investment in the academic success of our district. As it stands, if elected, I may be the only board member with children in the school system. I believe that the voice of parent(s) with children currently in our schools is heard to ensure that decisions reflect the needs of students, administrators and teachers."

As PTO president at Turn of River Middle School last year, I helped lead efforts during a challenging time by bringing together parents, teachers, administrators, and the Board of Education to create meaningful change. Through that experience, I demonstrated the ability to collaborate effectively, communicate concerns constructively, and advocate for decisions that put students and teachers first. If elected, I would bring that same dedication and problem-solving approach to the Board of Education to help strengthen our schools for every student."

– Jennifer Werely

"I am seeking election to the Stamford Board of Education because our schools require governance that is disciplined, transparent and grounded in experience. The Board must remain mindful of its responsibilities by clearly understanding the legal and procedural framework in which it is operating. This will avoid unnecessary political skirmishes and enhance public confidence in the Board's ability to act with consistency and integrity."

Equally important, Stamford generally underappreciates the genuine strengths of its public schools. The persistent perception of underperformance distorts priorities and creates the risk of underinvestment in a system that, in truth, serves students far better than it is often given credit for."

At a moment when the Board must recruit and hire a new superintendent and oversee the construction of new schools, Stamford needs leadership that combines legal acumen with executive experience. I bring the skills, judgment, and perspective necessary to ensure these initiatives are managed effectively and that our schools receive the respect and support they deserve."

– Adam Vandervoort

"I'm interested in being elected to the board for a couple of reasons. One is as a concerned parent for my kids that are currently in SPS. I feel we need a change, and with kids in High School, middle, and elementary, this is my time. I'm interested as a husband of a sps teacher, who sees the frustration and issues every single day. I want to be a voice for the teacher and parents who feel they are not being heard."

– Kris O'Brien

2. If elected, what would be your top three priorities to impact education in our schools?

"1. Raise Standards

Connecticut has one of the best public education systems in the nation, and it's time Stamford met that level. We must set high expectations in academics, behavior, and achievement while providing teachers and students the support they need to meet them. That means advocating for effective coursework, bringing back midterms and finals, and ensuring our curriculum prepares students for college, careers, and life beyond the classroom. Raising standards also means ensuring our teachers have the consistency and autonomy they need to succeed. Many educators cite burnout and lack of support as reasons for leaving the district, and we've already lost nearly 30% of our FTEs in the past four years. That's a serious issue. Teachers should be treated like professionals, have the opportunity to stay at one school if they choose, and be allowed to teach consistent courses with stable lesson plans. Consistency helps both teachers and students thrive.

2. Revive Accountability

Strong schools require strong accountability. Families deserve to know that administrators and board members are delivering real results. I will advocate for clear benchmarks to measure student progress and performance, amplify diverse voices on the Board, and establish transparent standards for leadership. Accountability also applies to district leadership. I believe the next superintendent's contract should tie compensation to measurable outcomes (student achievement, absenteeism, and teacher retention). Additionally, the superintendent should be required to meet regularly with the SEA president to improve communication, transparency, and trust for our teachers. Stamford cannot afford to lower the bar on accountability, we must be consistent and fair across the board.

3. Restore Trust

Stamford families and teachers deserve a Board of Education that listens, communicates openly. Too often, major decisions, like the 4x4 schedule, have been made without transparency or meaningful community input. I strongly oppose the 4x4 schedule because it reduces course offerings, disrupts learning continuity, and burdens staff and students alike. As we search for a new superintendent, teachers, parents, and students must all have a voice in this process in the superintendent search, because every stakeholder matters in shaping our schools' future. As a prospective member of the BOE, I want to make myself available to everyone. I plan to meet regularly visit the schools, meet with the community, and ensure that every person who reaches out to the board gets a response."

– Dennis LoDolce

"First is to find a superintendent that has our district's best interests in mind. Someone who sees the value and potential of our great students and teachers. 2nd is trying to change the way the board interacts with those who elected us. We need to put aside politics and personal goals and give the students, teachers and parents the resources they need to better succeed. And 3rd, school safety. A safe environment is essential for our schools. The board needs to do everything it can to ensure this."

– Kris O'Brien

"* Make Stamford More Competitive in Attracting and Retaining Excellent Teachers.

Our teachers are the most important factor in student success, yet Stamford's compensation lags behind that of comparable districts, when cost of living and work loads are considered. We need to make pay competitive and provide the support and respect that encourage great educators to build their careers here. Competitive compensation, professional stability, and trust in teachers' judgment are essential to improving student outcomes.

*** Hire and Support an Exceptional Superintendent Who Leads with Openness and Purpose.**

Stamford needs a superintendent who communicates clearly, welcomes public engagement, and builds trust through transparency and follow-through. The next leader must embrace the challenge of leading a diverse urban district, and must empower educators rather than govern by fiat. Selecting and supporting that kind of leader will be the Board's most important responsibility.

*** Improve Outcomes and Belonging for Multilingual Learners.**

A significant percentage of Stamford students speak a language other than English at home. We must expand bilingual and ESL staffing resources, strengthen newcomer support, and ensure that families feel connected and informed. When multilingual learners are supported and included, every student benefits from the richer, more dynamic learning environment that results."

– Adam Vandervoort

"1) Re-evaluating the 4x4 High School Schedule

One of my top priorities is addressing the flexible 4x4 high school schedule. This schedule has presented serious challenges for both students and teachers. In particular, understanding the potential impact of students not taking core subjects, such as math or science, for 6-8 months, along with not being able to accommodate specific class schedules. We must closely evaluate its impact on learning and demand clear evidence that it improves academic performance, especially since Stamford's test scores remain below the state average. I will advocate for re-considering this model, if all constituents agree that students are better served with prior schedules to ensure they receive the consistent, rigorous instruction they deserve.

2) Raising Expectations and Supporting Student Success

Another priority is shifting our focus to truly expecting and encouraging success from simply supporting students and preventing failure. Students want to be challenged, must be held accountable, and given the tools they need to grow academically, emotionally, and socially. This means strengthening curriculum standards, ensuring assessments reflect real aptitude, and creating a culture that motivates students to reach their potential. Stamford Public Schools must be a place where personal achievement is both expected and supported.

3) Finally, I will push for a board culture that values teamwork, transparency, and problem-solving, so that we attract members who are invested in education, not personal advancement. Our community deserves a Board that works together to strengthen schools, support teachers, and improve outcomes for all students."

– Jennifer Wereley

3. What attributes are you looking for in a superintendent?

“Stamford’s next superintendent must be an experienced, transparent, and accountable leader who can restore trust, raise academic achievement, and unite our community around a shared vision for success. We need someone with a proven record of improving student outcomes in a diverse district, someone who understands how to close learning gaps, support teachers, and strengthen student performance. This leader should communicate openly and often, listening to teachers, parents, and students before making decisions that affect the classroom. They must also prioritize teacher retention, school safety, and consistent standards. Ideally, our next superintendent will know Stamford or take the time to truly understand our community’s unique needs. Above all, we need a superintendent who leads with integrity, values collaboration, and keeps students and teachers at the center of every decision.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“Experience in a large and diverse district. Excellent communication skills and the ability to use them. Someone who is looking to improve our district, and is dedicated to the needs and wants of our teachers and students. Someone who will work with the Board. And maybe most important is someone who will listen to our teachers. The feedback I get is that teachers don’t feel supported. If we are supporting our teachers, we are setting them up for failure.”

– Kris O’Brien

“The superintendent is the most important hire our city will make for the schools in the foreseeable future. I believe SPS needs a leader with a vision for excellence, someone who can set clear, measurable goals and be fully transparent with the community about progress through data. The right superintendent should be a strong communicator and collaborator, working in true partnership with the Board of Education, teachers, families and students.

At the same time, the superintendent should arrive with curiosity and humility, taking the time to understand what’s already working in SPS and where change is needed. Finally, we need a leader with a demonstrated ability to serve a diverse student population effectively, ensuring every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to succeed.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“I would like to see a superintendent who is a true collaborator with a track-record of managing large school districts, who will lead with a commitment to both academic excellence and equity across a diverse student body. A strong superintendent must also be able to withstand political pressures, be financially astute, and make decisions that directly enhance student learning in a safe and inclusive manner.

Our Stamford schools must support our students in overcoming obstacles while challenging them to reach their highest potential. That means holding both staff and students accountable in a culture of high expectations.

Most importantly, every decision must be centered on students, placing their growth, success, and well-being at the core of our District’s mission.”

– Jennifer Werely

4. At what point, if any should the Board of Education intervene with or override a superintendent?

“The Board of Education has a clear mission and vision that guide the direction of our school district. If at any point the superintendent’s actions or decisions deviate from those priorities, it is the Board’s responsibility, not just its right, to step in and course correct. The superintendent is accountable to the Board, not the other way around. Our role is to provide oversight, ensure alignment with community values, and make sure every decision made by district leadership reflects the goals we set on behalf of Stamford’s students, teachers, and families.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“I think there are a few reasons. One is if the decision feels unethical or can create an unsafe situation. Another would be if we are hearing from our community that they are against the decision. We are elected officials that represent those who voted us in. If we are not listening and supporting them, we are not doing our jobs. We as a board need to be able to hold the superintendent accountable.”

– Kris O’Brien

“The Board’s job is not to micromanage the superintendent, but to ensure accountability. The superintendent runs the district day-to-day, but the Board sets goals, evaluates performance, and represents the public interest.

If a superintendent’s decisions consistently fall short of Board policy, legal or ethical standards, or the community’s expectations for openness and results, the Board must intervene. That doesn’t mean second-guessing individual personnel or classroom matters; it means stepping in when there’s a pattern of poor communication, weak execution, or disregard for direction set by the Board.

In short, the Board should override only when oversight has failed, but it must never shrink from that responsibility. Our children are served best by both professional management and democratic accountability.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“The Board of Education should respect the Superintendent’s role in managing the district day to day, but it also has a responsibility to provide oversight. If a policy driven by the Superintendent consistently raises serious concerns from parents, teachers, students, or administrators, then the Board must advocate constructively. At that point, it is the Board’s duty to work with the Superintendent to scrutinize the policy, evaluate its impact, and develop an effective solution. Ultimately, the Board must intervene when policies are not serving all stakeholders.”

– Jennifer Werely

5. What role should stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and community members, have in the selection process of the new superintendent?

“Teachers, parents, students, and community members should be active partners in selecting Stamford’s next superintendent. This process must be open, inclusive, and transparent, with opportunities for meaningful input through focus groups and surveys. The committee overseeing the search and hiring firm should prioritize community engagement at every step. As a Board member, I will ensure the process honors our commitment to listening to stakeholders and reflecting their feedback in the final decision. If anyone feels unheard, I will always make myself available to listen, because every voice in this community matters.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“Teachers, students and parents are directly impacted by our decision. And we need to interact with them and bring the community’s thoughts to the board and express them. We as a board need to remember this and listen to their issues. I have heard a lot, but would like to hear what more teachers, students and parents have to say on this and use that to help guide my decision.”

– Kris O’Brien

“Selecting a new superintendent is the Board’s most important responsibility, and it should be done transparently and with broad community input. Teachers, parents, students, and community members all have a stake in the district’s success, and their perspectives should inform both the search profile and the final selection.

Stakeholders should help define what kind of leader we need through surveys, focus groups, and open forums. While the final hiring decision must rest with the Board, the process should ensure that the person we hire has earned the community’s trust before ever taking office.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“The superintendent is the most important leadership role in the district, and the decision should reflect the voices of the entire school community. Students, parents, and educators each bring unique perspectives that are critical to identifying the right candidate.

Students should be invited to share what they value most in their learning environment, whether it’s feeling safe and supported, having access to engaging courses, or seeing diversity reflected in their classrooms. Parents should have opportunities to weigh in through gathering their insight with feedback and representation on advisory groups, so that family priorities around communication, equity, and academic excellence are heard. Educators, who work directly with students every day, should be actively involved in defining the qualities and support their needs from district leadership to succeed in the classroom.

By gathering input in a structured and transparent way, and by making sure that feedback is incorporated into the hiring criteria, we can ensure that the superintendent chosen is someone who reflects the needs of our diverse community and is committed to building trust, equity, and excellence across Stamford Public Schools.”

– Jennifer Werely

6. As a board member, how would you address equity for marginalized students across the district?

“I believe Stamford should ensure every student has the foundation they need to succeed from day one. For example, ESL students entering the district should have access to an early start English program before the school year begins, allowing them to focus on core academics once classes start. We should also strengthen partnerships with faith-based and community organizations to provide tutoring, mentorship, and enrichment opportunities that support both academic and personal growth.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“All students should have the same access to school resources. I think a way to address this is to be involved and see what a day to day looks like for these students in the schools. We need more in person experiences so we can see with our own eyes what the issues are, not just hearing about them. The board needs a better understanding of what it’s like to be in a classroom as both a teacher and a student.”

– Kris O’Brien

“Equity means making sure every student, regardless of language, background, or neighborhood, has the support and opportunities they need to succeed. In Stamford, that starts with strengthening in-district programs for multilingual learners and students with special needs so that fewer are sent out of district and more can thrive close to home.

It also means making sure that schools serving higher-need populations have smaller class sizes, stronger support staff, and the same quality of instruction and facilities as any other.

Finally, equity requires accountability: the Board should regularly review data on achievement gaps, disciplinary disparities, and access to advanced coursework, and insist on clear, public reporting and follow-up. Every child in Stamford deserves the same chance to learn, grow, and be proud of their school.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“As a board member, addressing equity means ensuring that every student, regardless of race, background, language, or ability, has the resources and support needed to succeed. Listening and understanding the experiences of marginalized students and their families would best allow identifying where gaps exist. Policies must target those needs. Teachers should have the support needed to ensure they, too, can help support marginalized students.

Academic support that targets students needs is important, ensuring that the schools provide resources to help students thrive academically, socially and emotionally. Outcomes of programs supporting an equitable environment must be held accountable, tracking outcomes and ensuring that there is positive impact.”

– Jennifer Werely

7. As a board member, how would you collaborate with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and community members?

“As a Board member, I will make it a priority to stay accessible and engaged with all stakeholders. For students and teachers, I plan to visit schools regularly during the year and hold informal discussions (such as lunchtime conversations) to hear their experiences and ideas directly. For parents and community members, I will host consistent public meetings and listening sessions to gather feedback and keep communication open. Most importantly, I will respond personally to everyone who reaches out to the Board. Collaboration begins with listening, and I’m committed to ensuring every voice in our school community is heard and respected.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“I like to communicate and listen. Listening is a key part of my professional career, and I would bring that to this role. I would constantly reach out and ask questions and opinions. I would visit schools and meetings, getting first hand knowledge and interactions. I would encourage everyone to contact me, and try to set up open houses and forums for as much interaction as possible. I am running to help improve the school district. And I am dedicated to do what it takes to achieve this.”

– Kris O’Brien

“Collaboration starts with listening. The Board should treat teachers, parents, students, and community members as partners, not as audiences. That means making information easier to access, meetings more welcoming, and decisions better explained.

Teachers deserve to be heard as professionals who understand what’s working and what’s not in our classrooms. Parents and students should have real opportunities to share experiences and ideas before decisions are made, not after. And community groups should be part of aligning what our schools teach with the skills our students need.

Good governance depends on trust, and trust grows from open, consistent dialogue. My goal is to help enhance the connection between the Board and the people it serves.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“As a board member, I would prioritize collaboration with all stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, and community members because that is the only way to effectively govern. As a parent, I’ve already used this approach at Turn of River Middle School, where I helped lead efforts to engage the entire school community during a time when the school culture faced serious challenges. Listening to various perspectives, understanding the issues, and focusing on practical, solution-oriented strategies allowed us to create real, positive change. I would bring that same approach to the Board of Education, ensuring that every voice is considered in decisions that impact our schools.”

– Jennifer Werely

8. How would you advocate for teachers who bring forward concerns about district wide issues including, but limited to student discipline, acts of student violence, lack of curriculum and/or curriculum materials?

“First, student discipline and acts of violence are school safety issues, and safe schools are non-negotiable for students, teachers, and staff. The Board must ensure that administrators are strong, responsive, and accountable for maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment. Failing to act on safety concerns not only undermines trust but also exposes the district to serious liability. Second, I will work closely with the superintendent to ensure teachers have the curriculum and materials they need to do their jobs effectively.. Teachers cannot be expected to deliver high-quality instruction without the proper tools. I will advocate for clear planning and communication before each school year begins, so every teacher feels prepared and supported. If department heads or teachers find themselves without the resources they need, I encourage them to reach out directly to me so I can bring those concerns to the superintendent and ensure they are addressed promptly.”

– Dennis LoDolce

“Safety is a key issue for me. I would take what I hear from teachers and address them directly with the board. I would make sure that we take those issues seriously and come up with solutions, and hold other members accountable. I have an invested interest in this, as I am also advocating for my spouse and friends. I would take specific examples and details and bring them to the board to address and find a solution.”

– Kris O’Brien

“Teachers are on the front lines of our schools and often see problems long before anyone else does. When they raise concerns about issues like student behavior, safety, or curriculum gaps, the district’s first response should be to listen, certainly not to deflect, minimize, or punish.

As a board member, I would insist that teachers have safe, clear channels to share concerns without fear of reprisal and that those concerns be tracked, addressed, and reported back publicly where appropriate. The Board’s job is to make sure problems don’t get buried in bureaucracy but are used to improve policy and practice.

A healthy district culture values candor and continuous improvement. When teachers feel heard and supported, our whole system gets stronger.”

– Adam Vandervoort

“The Board of Education must work together with the Stamford Education Association (SEA) to understand issues and concerns from teachers. It is critical to provide our educators with the resources, financial support, and professional development necessary to effectively meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of our students. By actively involving teachers in policy development and decision-making processes, while also maintaining clear standards of accountability, we create a professional environment where teachers feel valued, empowered, and invested in their own growth. This approach not only strengthens staff morale and retention but also directly translates to improved student outcomes, as educators are more engaged and equipped to deliver high-quality, inclusive instruction.”

– Jennifer Werely