

The 2013 Board of Education Candidates Reply

Question #2

What do you believe are the Metuchen School District's strengths? Are there areas in our schools where you'd like to see growth?

Rose deVries:

I think the District's strengths are our community groups, and caring staff, all of whom value an academic and co-curricular program.

The areas where I see room for growth in the District are in technology, high school course offerings and sports safety. The district is in the process of updating the technology infrastructure, which includes improving wireless capabilities throughout the district. AppliTrack online software is being used to recruit job applicants. These are some of the areas where technology has been improving and where I am confident the growth will continue.

High School course offerings that were recently added are three Advanced Placement (AP) courses: Statistics, Environmental Science and Government and Politics. I am advocating to add Advanced Placement Psychology, and the Curriculum Committee is continuing to advocate for Advanced Placement French and German languages.

The Athletic Department has implemented the ImPACT, <http://www.impacttest.com/>, concussion software program, that I advocated for, at the high school for all student athletes. Now I would like to see ImPACT fully implemented at the middle school for all students in grades 5-8 and for all students in the high school.

Jonathan Lifton:

Metuchen School District's strengths have always stemmed from our goal to educate the "whole" child; to support and promote not just academic excellence but also excellence in art and music, extra and co-curricular activities, and public service. These priorities are an extension of our community, and are a wonderful expression of what makes Metuchen a special place. Over the last three years we have made progress on many of the issues that I raised when I last ran for the board. We have added resources and restructured the guidance department, increased the availability of AP classes and increased the AP differential, extended our half day kindergarten program, and hired a new Superintendent that is focused on student achievement and excellence. Our current district goals are extremely ambitious and we are making good progress. One of the areas of concern continues to be raising the level of rigor and expectation for all students. Edgar Middle School has been designated a

focus school due to the wide disparity in the performance of our highest and lowest performing sub-groups. There is clearly work to be done to raise the level of our lower performing students. This is and will continue to be a focus of the board and the administration

Michael Stern:

As a whole, we live in a pretty caring and supportive community that places a high value on education. Overall, I think the Board has worked rather well with our educators and community in raising our standing in the State compared to other districts with a lot more money and resources. I'm looking to keep that going but also bring the perspective of a person who has been out there in business as well as a former military pilot who had the opportunity to see a lot of the world but eventually came back home to the same small town he grew up in and spent his formative years. Not only do I want to expand children's languages and IT abilities, I want us to focus on developing leadership and character amongst our kids. They need to come into direct contact with the world outside of Metuchen as much as they can. I'd like to try to bring in more unique learning opportunities with private and public partners both here and abroad

Question #3

Balanced Literacy and Differentiated Learning are now part of the District's curriculum at the elementary school level. How can we ensure success for all students at every level?

Rose deVries:

Success for every student can be ensured with instruction that is truly differentiated for each individual student at every level of ability, whether Language Arts Literacy classes are heterogeneously or homogeneously grouped for the 2013-2014 school year. Not only should every student receive his or her own Personalized Student Learning Plan (PSLP) and receive differentiated instruction, students of every ability level should receive an equal amount of weekly instruction time. Each student at every level needs teacher facilitation and support. All students at every level should be working in their zone of proximal development, which means every student should be challenged without being unduly stressed.

Jonathan Lifton:

As a board and a district, we must demand that all students be challenged and be facilitated in growing to their maximum potential at every level. Balanced Literacy and Differentiated Learning are the accepted best practices for accomplishing that goal in the elementary grades and was strongly recommended for implementation by our Superintendent and Director of Curriculum. The board has dedicated significant resources to insuring these programs are a success including hiring an implementation consultant and considerable professional development. All programs, however, must be continually monitored and evaluated using data driven metrics, and the board and administration will remain vigilant in assuring that these new programs are resulting in higher student achievement at all levels.

Michael Stern:

I must be honest here that I know next to nothing about Differentiated Learning nor do I pretend to have an opinion the subject. However, if you ask me how we can ensure success across all levels, we can back up and start by collecting all the video game consoles and iphones in the community and give them back to our kids when they're adults. The implied goal of "Balanced Literacy and Differentiated Learning" is to maximize kids' ability to read and comprehend as well their ability to absorb knowledge or learn. Well, last time I checked, that is rather difficult when we live in a culture that has virtually turned kids into "screen addicts". I'll get off my soap box now but I think you get my drift. Kids are not reading as much as they should in their personal time. They are virtually addicted to the Internet and social media and that is leading to decreased attention spans and a "short circuiting" of cognitive abilities. Until we get this epidemic under control, my fear is that we will not be able to bring out the best of our kids' abilities and learning.