

School Board Candidate Info Sheet, 2021
Eastchester Union Free School District / PTA Council

1. Name: Erin Murray

2. Education:

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY BEASLEY SCHOOL OF LAW

Juris Doctor, January 2003

ST. JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY

Master of Science, Education, May 1998

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

Bachelor of Arts, History and Political Science, May 1996

3. Current occupation/professional experience:

I am a mom of 4 children in the district. Previously, I taught elementary and middle school science in Philadelphia. I am also an attorney.

My legal training assists my analytical and collaborative decision making skills for the Board. My teaching background has helped me focus on what is best for the students of Eastchester. I have a sincere interest in public education.

I am a dedicated volunteer for many programs in Eastchester. I am a first grade catechist teacher at IHM. I coach girl's lacrosse for the Blue Devils and I established the Girls on the Run chapter for the town of Eastchester.

4. How many years have you lived in Eastchester? Do you have children who are currently attending or have graduated from Eastchester public schools?

My family moved to Eastchester in November 2008. I currently have a daughter at Greenvale, a daughter at the Middle School and a daughter and son at the High School

5. Have you been elected to any leadership roles in the school district or in community organizations? What have you learned from these positions?

I was elected as Trustee of the Board of Education in 2018. During my three-year term I rapidly learned the ins and outs of the school district. The quantity of information I needed to learn as Trustee is massive. I became conversant in facilities and decisions regarding boiler removal, gym roofs, turf fields, security entrances, bonds and fire codes. I made various personnel decisions concerning

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hiring, tenure, contract negotiations and labor disputes. With respect to the five schools I have addressed programming, cafeteria contracts, transportation, school trips, special education, technology and school safety. One of the most important tasks is the School Budget; negotiating what's included in the budget, tax cap, and state funding. I have taken the time to carefully learn how the School District runs and to make deliberate decisions for the benefit of the students of Eastchester.

As chair of the Board's Advocacy Committee I learned that Eastchester has been handicapped by shortfalls in State funding and I have made calculated decisions to support budgets that comply with the state tax cap. As chair of the Safety and Security Committee I worked with community stakeholders to create an improvement plan for the district facilities.

I learned that our district is capable of a complete technological transformation and that we have fabulous teachers and programming to support our students at all levels. Most importantly, I learned to work with a Board of eight (8) other individuals to make well-informed decisions that impact our students. Ultimately, as a Board Trustee, I have been trusted with the welfare of more than 3200 students in the EUFSD and the investment made by the Eastchester taxpayers. The School Board is a pretty immense volunteer commitment. Decisions made today influence our children in the future. I take this responsibility seriously.

My efforts as Legislative Advocacy Liaison to the Westchester Putnam Boards of Education led to my nomination to the WPSBA Board of Directors in 2020. This role has given me a broader view on state funding. I learned to lobby Albany as a collective voice with other Westchester districts. I forged relationships with Board members from neighboring districts and our local representatives Shelly Mayer and Amy Paulin. I learned to leverage these relationships to benefit the students of Eastchester.

I have been elected to various executive PTA positions at the elementary schools. In my experience on the PTA's I have seen the state of the schools first hand. Interacting with parents, teachers and principals I listened to concerns and suggestions to improve the programming for the students.

In collaboration with teachers, I helped establish the Girls on the Run after school club at

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Greenvale. This fall I initiated the inclusion of the club in Eastchester Parks and Recreations' offerings. In a crazy year of hybrid learning and limited activities, this program has encouraged positivity and built connections and commonalities with girls throughout Eastchester.

6. What do you see as the role of a School Board trustee?

School Board Trustees both individually and collectively must be leaders for the Eastchester School District and the community. A Trustee understands the varied needs of our five district schools and the important relationship between the schools and families. A Trustee appreciates the complexities of dealing with all stakeholders and works collaboratively with eight other Board members to create clear expectations for district achievement. A productive Trustee contributes their unique talents and works to reach decisions with other Board members based on the consensus process.

Trustees work to create a vision for the future of education in our district. They set goals and standards designed to meet the needs of the students. A Trustee sets policies that guide and direct our School District. Finally, our School Board has to make a lot of choices. The role of the Trustee is to apply logic and common sense and use reliable information to make decisions for the children who are entrusted to our School District.

7. What skills do you see yourself bringing to the School Board?

I bring experience to the School Board. In my three years on the Eastchester Board of Education I engaged in rational thoughtful discourse with the Board and I made well reasoned and well researched decisions for the district. My candidness and my ability to communicate and collaborate with all stakeholders prompt decisions that impact all the students in the district. I bring common sense to the School Board. I am a hardworking, no nonsense, Mother of 4 children at Greenvale, Middle and High Schools. I interact with community stakeholders on a daily basis and see first hand the impact of our decisions in the classrooms. While I acknowledge there is much more to master, I have a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of the School District. I prioritize the children in our district and it is important to hold onto the skills of an experienced Board member.

8. What is your educational philosophy and how would it inform your work as a Board

member?

I am a big supporter of project-based learning. The multiple discipline structure guides students to identify problems and develop solutions using evidence to support a claim. The idea that children can explore multiple concepts, ideas and solutions for real world problems makes them better geared to becoming independent thinkers in society. In my tenure as a Board Trustee we approved the Supervisor of STEM position and supported increased project based learning. While project based learning is great for STEM concepts it can be utilized broadly across the curriculum. For example, our Supervisor of Humanities, Susan Chester, designed a Civics Research program. This program will provide students with the opportunity to study local issues that impact the Town of Eastchester and our District. The goal is to teach collaboration, creativity, and communication and to take action. These are real world skills the students of Eastchester will graduate with. As a Board member I will continue to support project-based curriculum.

9. How do you see the state tax cap impacting school budget decisions in the coming years? What will be your approach to budget decisions?

The bulk of Eastchester's school budget is funded by property taxes. The tax cap, initiated in 2012, was meant to limit gross acceleration of property taxes. For a town like Eastchester, this tax relief was soundly needed. The School Board however, when creating its annual school budget, needs to be fiscally cautious and stay under the tax cap.

As costs rise and Eastchester strives to meet increased expectations the inability to raise additional tax levy is a problem. Changing the tax cap to a standard 2% rather than 2% or the rate of inflation could allow Eastchester to provide more money for the school district and more stability in our school budget decisions. Particularly in a year like this one, expenses related to COVID and reopening have nothing to do with inflation. However, even with fiscal restraints the Board has creatively come up with strategies to maintain class size, expand curriculum and meet infrastructure needs.

During my three years on the Board I have had to make difficult decisions about personnel, programming and facility improvements based on the tax cap. While we are constrained by the tax

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cap, the Board nevertheless approves budgets that allow the School District to improve. The District has increased music instruction, added teachers, guidance and proposed library media specialists and additional chrome book carts for the Elementary Schools. At the Middle School we hired special education teachers for co-teaching models in 7th and 8th grade, increased physical education and proposed chrome books for every sixth grader as well as the addition of 3 modified sports teams. Finally, at the High School the District has increased health and ENL instruction and proposed 5 additional occupational education spots and the addition of co-taught math for algebra and geometry.

Our School Board strives to provide the chance for students to succeed while being responsive to taxpayer concerns. There may be a push statewide to change the tax cap to a flat 2% increase in the next few years. Until then I will continue to work with the Board to determine how to best budget for our School District.

10. What are your top three priorities for the Eastchester School District? How would you help advance these priorities?

The School Board collectively supports the opening of schools. Given our progress in this regard, we anticipate continued forward momentum and for schools to be fully open in September. Therefore, my top three priorities focus on what I want for the future of our School District. If I am re-elected my first three priorities are:

1. Securing District Resources: While Eastchester received an additional \$1.4 million in foundation aid this spring, I will keep lobbying Albany until we receive 100% foundation aid. As the chair of the Board's Advocacy committee I will use my relationships with Shelley Mayer and Amy Paulin to keep Eastchester in their focus. Our goal is to add an additional \$1.8 million in foundation aid each year for the next two years. The added resources will pave the way for our school district to offer specified programming to drive our students academic success.
2. Accelerate Student Learning While Focusing on the Whole Child: I will work to identify gaps in student learning and to improve student and district performance. As a member of the Strategic Planning Committee I will advocate for curriculum and district programming that will prioritize standards, diagnose essential missed learning and

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promote interdependent and collaborative student learning. Accelerate student learning can support students needed skills so they can continue with grade level work. Supports such as tutoring, small group instruction, focused learning and the use of data to determine the best supports for each student will benefit the whole child.

3. Hiring the Best and most Talented Educators for our Students: Our teachers are tasked with engaging and motivating our students for academic success and they have an overall impact on Eastchester's reputation. I will encourage the continued hiring of bright, enthusiastic educators with the goal of creating a whole child learning environment. I will challenge administrators to create a school culture that promotes exploration, diversity, discovery and creativity for our students