



Brian Fleischer

- 1. Please provide 3 words that capture your candidacy.

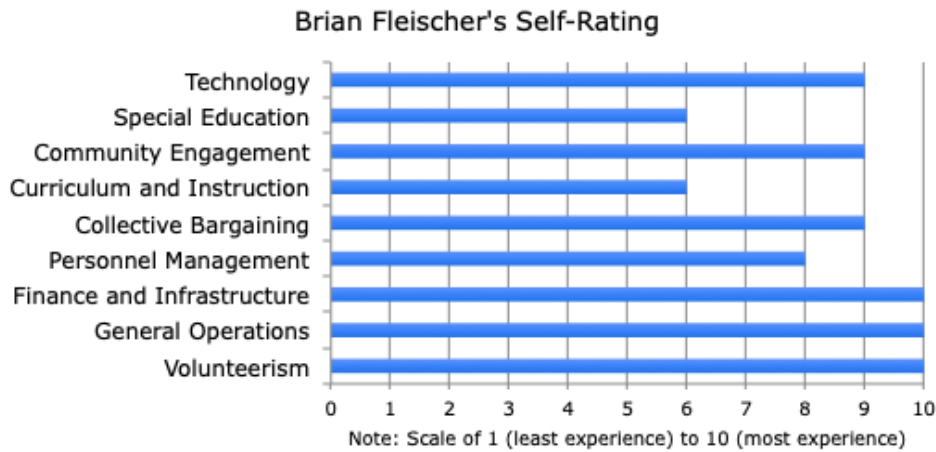
Experience, Empathy, Equity

- 2. Why are you running for the BOE? Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the Board of Education.

Public schools are my passion. I believe that public schools can and must strive to be an engine for greater equity in our society, supporting all children in reaching their potential as educated, well-rounded and engaged members of their communities. In addition to making my career in the field of K-12 public education operations, finance and risk, I have a life-long connection with and commitment to the Montclair Public Schools in particular. I love these schools and the Montclair community and want to be a part of making them the best they can be for all students.

While I do not consider myself a single issue candidate, I am committed to the belief that all issues that come before the school board - fiscal, operational, academic, climate and culture - should be examined through a lens of commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

- 3. Please rate your work/life experience in



Please feel free to elaborate on any of the above self-rating.

General Operations/Finance and Infrastructure/Technology: I am a lawyer who has dedicated the lion's share of my career to the field of K-12 public education. From my time as a law clerk on the New Jersey Supreme Court serving as my Justice's primary research clerk for the Abbott v Burke V school funding equity case, through my years as Auditor General for the New York City public schools, Business Administrator/Board Secretary for the Montclair Public Schools, and now Director of Enterprise Risk for the New York City School Construction Authority, I have gained skills and experience in K-12



public education governance, finance and operations strategy and execution, compliance, internal audit and risk management, facilities planning, maintenance and capital projects, safety and security, technology, transportation, and food service. I am a certified New Jersey School Business Administrator. Since leaving the employ of the Montclair Public Schools, I have remained actively engaged and informed through my extensive volunteer work, as well as through regular attendance at meetings of the Montclair Board of Education. Specifically with respect to capital and facilities planning, my years as Director of Internal Audit and now Director of Enterprise Risk with the New York City School Construction Authority have materially enhanced my knowledge and experience with respect to capital plan development and management, including all phases of project development and execution.

Collective Bargaining/Personnel Management: In my time as School Business Administrator for the Montclair Public Schools, I supported the district's planning and execution of collective bargaining with all three of the district's bargaining units (the Montclair Education Association, the Montclair Principals Association, and the Montclair Head Custodians Association) and therefore have strong familiarity with the collective bargaining process and the nature of the district's collective bargaining agreements. And through much of my career, in Montclair and elsewhere, I have worked in close collaboration with school and district administrators, teachers and other certified and non-certified instructional support staff, as well as operations, maintenance, technology, health and security school support staff, and have developed deep respect and empathy for the dedicated professionals in those roles, which I believe is critical to fair, thoughtful and effective collective bargaining and personnel management.

Curriculum and Instruction/Special Education: I am not a trained pedagogue and have not been a classroom teacher, so would never rate my experience in these areas above that of licensed and experienced educators. But I was raised by an educator, I married an educator, and I have surrounded myself with educators throughout my career and my volunteer work in the service of public schools, learning as much as I can about topics and issues in curriculum and instruction, special education, and support for English Language Learners, and striving to understand the theory and the practice of teaching and learning at a level of breadth and depth that allows me to analyze whether a district's governance, policies and procedures, facilities and technology, and fiscal and human resources are effective and aligned with the critical goals of supporting and achieving academic success for all learners.

4. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

I have a life-long connection with and commitment to the Montclair Public Schools and the community they serve. I am an alumnus of Watchung, Glenfield and MHS, the son of a retired MPS kindergarten teacher, a former MPS Business Administrator, the parent of a 9th grader at MHS and a 6th grader at Glenfield, an administrator of the Montclair Moms, Dads and Parents Facebook Group, a member of the NAACP Education Committee, a PTA co-president at Glenfield and former PTA president at Hillside, a member of the Montclair PTA Council's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and Finance and Infrastructure Committee, and I recently finished two years as the Montclair PTA Council Vice President for Committees. I was also active on the District Reopening Committee in Summer 2021. In the course of all of this work, I have sought to share my knowledge about and love for



the Montclair Public Schools with all of the stakeholders in our district, because I believe informing and empowering all stakeholders to engage effectively with the district and the schools ultimately helps to drive greater equity, inclusion, opportunity and achievement for all students.

5. If elected, what are your top 2-3 priorities for the BOE? Specifically, what do you think the BOE should prioritize in the next year and what should be prioritized in a longer-term plan?

For too long we tolerated an inadequate level of investment in our school facilities and infrastructure, and it's come back to bite us in a big way over the past several years, both before and during the COVID pandemic. The sustained failure of our old governance model to rise to meet the capital needs of the district was to me the biggest reason to convert from a Type 1 to a Type 2 district. As a community, we now have the power and the obligation to redress those extensive capital needs. Our children and staff need and deserve safe, healthy, technologically modern and attractive schools, classrooms, facilities and grounds. They deserve infrastructure that facilitates learning and pedagogical best practices, as well as supporting school pride and belonging. This encompasses everything from ventilation and indoor air quality, to the integrity of our building structures, to effective IT infrastructure and connectivity, to safe, fun and attractive playgrounds. A district of our size with schools the age of our schools probably needs steady capital investment in the range of \$10-20 million per year, and we as a district have come nowhere close to that in over a decade since the opening of the Charles H. Bullock School in 2010. I believe we as a community need to support the \$188 million facilities bond referendum, also referred to as the "Community Investment Plan", this November, to get us back on the right track, and to take advantage of the pre-approved \$58 million in debt service aid from the State. And the Board needs to ensure that the district is prepared to effectively execute those projects upon passage by the voters, managing the performance of the architects and contractors to ensure high-quality designs and specifications, high-quality workmanship, and on-time and on-budget project delivery. All of that must be supported with clear and consistent management reporting to the Board and to the community on the district's progress in executing the projects in the capital plan and in managing the district's debt service.

We also need more effective and sustained strategic planning, execution and monitoring with respect to our district goals for diversity, equity, inclusion, opportunity and student achievement. With the strength of our diversity comes a solemn obligation to work proactively to redress opportunity and achievement gaps, structural racism and unconscious bias, and other obstacles to equity and inclusion for students of all backgrounds and abilities. Moreover, meeting the educational, health and wellness, social and emotional needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, has to be a lived moral commitment shared by all stakeholders in the district, not just a compliance exercise. Strategic planning, execution and monitoring requires that we establish clear goals and objectives, key risk indicators and key performance indicators, and management reporting expectations connected to those goals and metrics. Consistency in district leadership can make such work easier, but the Board of Education also needs to insist on a structure for strategic planning, execution and monitoring, evaluation and accountability that can be sustained through changes in district leadership.



The district also needs to establish and execute clear and thorough plans for implementing universal public pre-kindergarten and later school start times for middle and high school. With both declining K-12 enrollment and increasing federal and state funding becoming available for pre-kindergarten expansion, now is the time to seize the opportunity to implement high-quality free universal pre-kindergarten, which research suggests is the most impactful intervention we can pursue to close the opportunity gap. Later school start times for middle and high school are also a research-supported intervention that can materially improve student outcomes by better aligning the school day with the natural developmental sleep patterns of tweens and teens.

6. In your opinion, what would be an "ideal/well" functioning BOE? How can the BOE be more accessible and more communicative with the community?

I believe that an effective school board member needs to possess or be able to develop a reasonable level of proficiency to synthesize myriad inputs from the Superintendent, district administration, contracted advisors, staff, parents, students and other community stakeholders to make reasoned, intelligent, informed, empathetic and antiracist policy and governance decisions in concert with their fellow board members. While not every board member needs to be individually expert in all matters of pedagogy and educational programs, district finance and operations, facilities and construction, education law and compliance, labor relations, and best practices for assessing and addressing the academic, health and wellness needs of children, collectively, a school board needs to be able to work together, leveraging each member's unique skills and experiences, in consultation with the district administration and its contracted advisors, and the broader community, to be an effective school board that fulfills its obligation to engage in sound governance and policy making for the benefit of all children served by the district. Sound governance and policy oversight will compel proactive, robust and sustained strategic planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation and accountability connected to clearly-defined board and district goals and objectives, supported with both quantitative and qualitative data.

An effective school board also needs to be able to engage in effective multi-directional communication that empowers all families to understand how they can most effectively partner with the district to help their children and all children in the district to reach their potential, that empowers district staff to serve the needs of all children in the district within the context of a healthy and supportive work environment, and that effectively solicits and leverages the support of other community partners. I have always been committed to open, inclusive, respectful, empathetic and collaborative dialogue, deliberation and decision-making. In the spirit of the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, it is important that all school board members actively demonstrate at their meetings that commitment to open, inclusive, respectful, empathetic and collaborative dialogue, deliberation and decision making, as well as carrying that same mindset into the school board's closed session and committee work.

7. Recognizing that relationships are a foundation of our school community, what specific steps would you take to improve the relationships between the BOE and the district administrators, the various unions, and parents/caregivers?



I touched on this in two prior responses. First, we need to commit to engaging and communicating with all stakeholders in ways that are grounded in empathy and respect, equity and inclusion. Second, we need to commit to transparency and accountability, open and collaborative dialogue, deliberation and decision making. That includes being open and honest about positive and negative news and results, supported with clear and effective management reporting on timelines and performance metrics. All of that contributes to establishing trust among district stakeholders, and relationships built on trust are both healthier and easier to sustain.

8. What should MPSD do differently? Please be specific – academic programs, sports, civic programs, extra curriculums, etc.

As I have noted previously, MPS needs to improve its strategic planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation and management reporting. I spoke above about the need for more effective and sustained strategic planning, execution and monitoring with respect to our district goals for diversity, equity, inclusion, opportunity and student achievement, so that we can fulfill our commitment to meeting the educational, health and wellness, social and emotional needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

But enhanced planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation and management reporting is also critical with respect to the district's development and management of its operating budget, as well as its facilities management. More specifically, budget conversations with key district stakeholders and the public need to begin much earlier in the year, including any scheduling and staffing analysis and collaborative solutioning, to break the cycle we have seen in recent years where the Board is asked to approve a budget with a large unspecified placeholder cut to school personnel, leading to excessive non-renewals and delayed final budget and staffing decisions that have damaged employee, parent and student morale and caused us to lose exceptional teachers and support personnel to other districts.

On a completely different topic, the district needs to increase its efforts, in collaboration with the PTAs, MFEF, MNDC and other community partners, to establish and sustain more varied, equitable and inclusive after-school programming, most particularly at the middle school level where such options have been lacking. In particular, students from families that cannot afford private activities or who are not able to secure reliable transportation to such activities need the district to help fill that void to support the needs, passions, gifts and talents of our students.

9. What are your thoughts on school district's programs for special education students? How can the BOE better serve the special education students, and what would you do as a board member to ensure our special education students' needs are being addressed?

As I noted above, meeting the educational, health and wellness, social and emotional needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, has to be a lived moral commitment shared by all stakeholders in the district, not just a compliance exercise. It is the Board's obligation, through policy and oversight, to help assure that the system is designed and functioning to fulfill the moral commitments we have as a district and a community to meet the educational, health and wellness, social



and emotional needs of all children. In some ways, the legal and regulatory framework under which we must operate can drive a compliance-focused approach to the processes for implementation and monitoring in areas like special education and English Language Learners. When we hear from the parents and the students in these programs that they do not feel adequately supported and valued, or that they are upset about losing staff who have valued and supported them, it ultimately is not sufficient to respond that we are in compliance and will be in compliance, because we've scheduled all students with the required educational specialists. Compliance with IEPs and 504 plans and with the laws and regulations governing services for English Language Learners is absolutely necessary, but it is not sufficient. Assignment of the required educational specialists is a huge component of meeting the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, but the system cannot then leave those professionals on an island bearing all of the responsibility for meeting the needs of those children. Serving the best interests of the children, with a driving commitment to equity and inclusion, remains a shared responsibility of all stakeholders, including general education staff, school and district administration, the Board, and the community. And we of course need to have processes in place to ensure that the students are achieving positive outcomes, and where students are not achieving positive outcomes, that we are adjusting their program accordingly. We need to ensure that the district is continuing to move forward with its implementation of the recommendations from the GoTeach audit of our special education program, and that those changes are effective and sustained. And we need to maintain effective channels for communication and collaboration with the Special Education Parent Advisory Counsel and the community of parents and children who are served in special education to listen to their feedback regarding how effectively we're rising to meet the needs of each child.

10. How can the BOE address the opportunity/achievement gap in our district? What are your specific ideas and plans for addressing the achievement gap and educational equity? In your opinion, what is the role of BOE in this area?

Growing state and federal support for the expansion of free public early childhood education programs, including universal full-day, public pre-kindergarten, as well as preschool programs for 3-year-olds, provides a tremendous opportunity for addressing the district's persistent opportunity and achievement gaps. We need to develop a thorough and thoughtful plan for implementing universal free public full-day pre-kindergarten in Montclair as expeditiously as possible, as well as assessing the availability of funding to serve as many 3-year-olds as possible in high-quality preschool programs.

Meanwhile, in K-12, segregation of certain in-school programs and disproportionality in student discipline and in special education referral and classification patterns remain troubling symptoms and drivers of inequity, contributing to the opportunity and achievement gaps. Again, history is a critical guide. Without affirmative, conscious and effective anti-racist policies and procedures, one can expect to see a sustained privileging of white spaces and whitening of privileged spaces. The district has an obligation to meet the educational needs of every child to help every child succeed, and that (along with federal and state mandates) will require us to retain some level of "gifted and talented" programming, honors and AP programming, enrichment programming, academic intervention programming and, of course, special education programming and services that meet the needs of individual children as developed through the IEP and 504



processes, and programming and services that meet the needs of our growing population of English Language Learners. And the Small Learning Communities at MHS can also serve to enhance the diversity of the curriculum while enriching depth for students in their areas of passion. But we need to analyze the policies, processes and procedures used to identify, evaluate and assign children into such programs and we need to do so using anti-racist and intersectional lenses. We cannot simply accept special education disproportionality that largely “supplements” to meet the needs of children from more privileged families while it largely “contains” children from less privileged families. We cannot allow access to gifted and talented, honors and AP programming to be heavily dependent on standardized tests that can be gamed with access to high-priced tutoring, nor can we allow it to be heavily dependent on teacher referrals subject to conscious and unconscious bias, nor can we allow it to be heavily dependent on parent requests that reward insider knowledge and “squeaky wheel” persistence. Addressing programmatic segregation requires a multi-faceted approach guided by diversity, equity and inclusion goals and strategies, including anti-bias training and process transparency. Meanwhile, the district needs to affirmatively monitor for disproportionality in student discipline and in special education referrals and classifications by category and to establish equity goals supported by key risk indicators and key performance indicators to be monitored to assess the impacts of laudable programs like Restorative Justice and Response to Intervention, along with other strategies developed and implemented to achieve those equity goals.

11. How should the BOE balance the need to provide a quality education with the need to manage the local taxpayer burden? What should the district’s capital spend priorities be? Would you consider budget cuts, if so – what specific areas would you cut?

As I noted above, the budget process as a whole needs to be improved. The Board needs to establish clear expectations around the governance, planning, development and communications for the budget process. It cannot be a one-month sprint that leaves the district and the Board scrambling to figure out how to close a projected deficit even after the final deadline for budget passage, bumping into the deadline for providing notice of non-renewal to non-tenured staff. The budget process has to be a continuous one, with the district regularly updating the Board’s Finance and Facilities Committee about projected or actual cost increases (e.g., in transportation bid and award), projected and actual salary breakage, projected in-year line item deficits or surpluses and corresponding appropriation adjustments, health insurance experience and projections, and more. Staff scheduling efficiency analysis should be performed in active consultation with building principals as schools are developing and adjusting their schedules, preferably in the Spring for the subsequent academic year, with re-analysis in the Fall with respect to any enrollment-based changes in staffing and scheduling. Where and when Central Office identifies opportunities for scheduling and staffing efficiencies, these should be discussed with the building principals, the union and the Board early in the year to support collaborative solutioning. Where possible, the Business Office should develop and present to the Superintendent and the Board Finance and Facilities Committee multi-year revenue and expenditure projections.

Even with the best advanced, continuous and collaborative budget management, budget planning and problem solving, however, it is important to acknowledge that if the district stays bound by the two-percent cap on annual increases to the tax levy, it will remain



unable to meet the projected cost increase simply to sustain existing staffing and programs year over year, let alone to fund critical new programs and initiatives to drive improvement. We of course need to examine opportunities for greater efficiency on an annual basis, and we need to engage in meaningful program evaluation to identify areas where existing resources perhaps should be reinvested elsewhere, but there's a limit to how much blood can be drawn from a stone, and we need to be thorough and thoughtful to assess the impacts of any potential staffing or programming cuts on our students. For that reason, it is important to remain open to the possibility that the needs of our students may in some years require serious consideration of bringing a public question to the voters to increase tax levy revenues more than two percent, while also recognizing the district's obligation to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and to weigh the impacts of such tax increases on Montclair residents and, in turn, on our town's treasured diversity. The district and the Board also need to work in collaboration with stakeholders to find other innovative ways to increase revenue and/or reduce costs, such as through more aggressive pursuit of competitive grants, or through the design and implementation of outstanding in-district special education programs that not only allow us to serve more Montclair children in-district, but could also allow us to draw tuition-paying children from other districts. And all budget decisions and the projected impacts of those decisions have to be examined through the lenses of diversity, equity, inclusion and antiracism.

12. Montclair is known for its magnet schools, which are supported by a unique school ranking and placement process and a "courtesy busing" program. What changes, if any, would you consider with respect to the magnet system, the school ranking and placement process, and/or the courtesy busing policy?

Montclair's magnet system is and has been one of its most unique and attractive attributes, and we need to understand and respect the history that led Montclair to implement it starting with two schools in 1977 as part of its response to a court order mandating desegregation of our schools, and expanding over time to include theme-based programming at all schools K-8. And the district's courtesy busing policy, wherein bus transportation is offered free of charge to students residing more than one mile from their assigned school in Grades K-8 (whereas state law would only require the district to offer free busing to students residing more than two miles from their assigned school) was and remains critical to the implementation of the magnet system. Although Montclair's demographics have shifted several times since 1977, a return to traditional "neighborhood schools", with children automatically assigned to the school closest to their home and busing provided only to the extent required by state law, would still result in material de facto re-segregation of schools at both the elementary and middle school levels, due to sustained patterns of residential segregation in Montclair. History advises us strongly that increasing school segregation leads to increases in inequity. I cannot and will not support changes to the Montclair Public Schools that will lead to increases in inequity, and therefore cannot and will not support the elimination of our magnet system or of the courtesy busing program on which it depends.

That does not, however, lead me to benign acceptance of the status quo with respect to school integration and the district's school placement process. Even with our magnet system and courtesy busing in place, we have seen over the past decade plus a troubling pattern of creeping re-segregation in our elementary schools that is starting to spill into our middle schools. This issue needs to be analyzed so that we can consider changes that



reinvigorate our magnet system and better assure that it effectively serves its *raison d'être* of enhancing integration and equity. This could require a demographic study, a redrawing of the zones leveraged as a proxy for diversity, a detailed analysis of the school placement procedures and computer algorithm, and surveys or community conversations about the “attractiveness” of the existing magnet themes versus the other factors driving school ranking patterns across different demographics. Again, history tells us that increasing school segregation leads to increases in inequity, and the district has already seen a blatant example of that play out in the substantiated Buildings & Grounds whistleblower report where (now-former) district officials de-prioritized the work orders from what they derisively called the “ghetto schools.”