

2021 Board of Education Candidate Biographies
Listed in ballot order
Biographies are published as submitted by the candidates, unedited

3-Year Term Candidates for 3 Open Seats

Jen Fleisher

62 Cameo Drive

The daughter of a teacher and school nurse, and mother of 3 children, Jen Fleisher has committed the last two decades to improving Cherry Hill Public Schools for our kids. Jen is a leader who gets things done. She is an unwavering believer in the value of public education, leading by example, working collaboratively to solve problems, and treating individuals with dignity and respect.

Jen served as a PTA President at both Stockton and Rosa, sat on the PTA Executive Board at Beck and has been the Chair of Cherry Hill's Zone PTA. She has also led the Zone PTA's District Committees on Character Education, Health and Safety and helped create the Fair Funding Committee. As a community leader, Jen collaborated on Stockton's, East's and the Cherry Hill District's successful bids for the State and National Schools and District of Character. She is the former director of the Cherry Hill Drug and Alcohol Alliance, current member of the Camden County Addiction Task Force, and sits on the Ithaca College Alumni Association Board of Directors, where she received her BS in Exercise Physiology. She also serves on the National Advisory Board of Foundations, Inc.—a non-profit committed to improving education and supporting educators in disadvantaged communities. Jen runs her own holistic health consulting firm which specializes in creating and teaching classes for hospital systems, non-profits and other organizations to help people live their best and most healthy lives.

Jen has been a resident of Cherry Hill for 29 years. She and her husband, Dave, have seen firsthand the outstanding education that Cherry Hill Public Schools offers, as two of their three children have graduated and their youngest is entering his senior year. She is committed to helping Cherry Hill Schools reach its fullest potential by providing world-class education and opportunities for our students. She believes in accountability for taxpayers, and will ensure schools act in a fiscally-responsible manner. She will continue to fight to ensure Cherry Hill gets its fair share of funding. There are challenges to tackle in our schools—including ensuring that our facilities are brought into the 21st century—and Jen is ready to get results.

If elected, Jen will be a leader committed to serving all students inclusively and equitably. She is optimistic about the future, and is prepared to roll up her sleeves for the students and families in the town she loves.

Nicholas J. Gaudio, Jr. – “Unmask Our Children”

13 Hillcroft Lane

Nicholas (Nick) is a 30 year Cherry Hill resident, having grown up in the Kingston neighborhood from age 5-25, during which time he attended Kingston Elementary School, Carusi Middle School, and Cherry Hill High School West (1999) and Villanova University (2003). With his wife, Christina, deceased in 2019, he had lived in Merchantville and Reston, Virginia from 2005-2011, ultimately moving to the Olde Springs Crossing neighborhood of Cherry Hill in 2011. Their move back to Cherry Hill was influenced by Cherry Hill's strong public education system and diverse community for their older daughter, Sophia (now 11, Rosa International Middle School), and future daughter, Lucille (now 8, Thomas Paine Elementary School).

As a sociable, widowed single parent, Nick prides himself on his informal open door policy to all friends, neighbors, and their children, and the casual nature of being on a first name basis with all. For years, family and friends have tried to convince Nick to get involved in politics because of his friendly demeanor, ability to disagree fearlessly but respectfully, and ability to validate his opinions with logic and facts. At a time while all of our children are experiencing a reduction in their own personal freedom, Nick has decided that he needed to advocate for our children. Nick is a lifelong believer in all personal liberties and freedoms, and does not support the notion that any citizens should be subjects to federal, state, or local governments, including restrictions on their rights to receive their education without limiting their ability to breathe freely.

Nick grew up in a public school household. His father, Nick Sr., well known around town for his archival videography, was a 30+ year elementary educator for the School District of Philadelphia. His mother, Lauren, known around town for her excellent Italian-American cooking, was an active member of the PTA throughout his childhood. His upbringing influenced Nick to take an active role in his children's schooling, attending and/or chaperoning all of their school events, field trips, parties, and meetings. He has a warm and close relationship with all faculty, staff, and administration at their elementary school.

Nick has over 20 years of experience as a systems/security engineer in the defense industry. He received his BS and MS in Computer Engineering from Villanova University in 2003 and 2005, respectively. He is the Vice President of the Association of Scientists and Professional Engineering Personnel (ASPEP) and is also a board member for his condominium association in Wildwood, NJ. In his free time, Nick enjoys spending his summers with his family at Cherry Valley Swim Club and on the beach in Wildwood. Nick also enjoys playing guitar, exercising, cooking spicy food, and making coffee with his French press and manual grinder. Nick is his daughters' biggest cheerleader during swim meets and he enjoys helping coach their softball teams.

Sally Tong – “Responsible, Invested, Bold”

24 Vanessa Court

I graduated from Stony Brook University and have been working in the health care sector for over 10 years. Lately, I have been involved in consulting and networking with health professionals in the integrative/holistic medicine field through the NutraMetrix program. I have been a resident of Cherry Hill for 25 years where I have raised four children, three of whom have graduated from Cherry Hill East while the other one is still enrolled in the Cherry Hill school system. Because of my passion for community participation, I am currently serving as the Vice President of the Chinese Asian Women Sisterhood Society of Philadelphia, a member of the Asian American Women's Coalition, and a member of the Kentucky Colonel.

I have served on the BOE since 2018 and different committees over time. We are facing many new and old challenges to provide the best educational opportunities for our students and it will take our whole community to move forward

John Papeika – “Responsible, Invested, Bold”

25 Waverly Road

John has been a resident of Cherry Hill, NJ for 10 years; he and his wife have two sons. John was born in Philadelphia, PA and went to Father Judge High school. He graduated from Holy Family University with a master's degree in Human Resources and a bachelor's degree in Management Marketing.

John is a certified Professional of Food and Safety as accredited by the National Environmental Health Association. Professionally, John works as a manager of retail safety and regulatory compliance for an East Coast supermarket. John and his family live in the Old Orchard section of Cherry Hill, where he helps as a moderator of their community's media page and events.

Having children who will be students in the school system for many years to come, John has a keen interest in maximizing the effectiveness of the school system. As a school board member, John will challenge himself and others to make the best decisions for the students, staff and all resident of Cherry Hill.

Carolina Bevad – “Responsible, Invested, Bold”

1213 Cropwell Road

Carolina graduated from New York University with a bachelor’s degree in elementary and special education and a master’s degree in English as a Second Language. Before becoming a stay-at-home-mom, Carolina taught high school ESL in Title I schools in the Bronx and Manhattan. As a teacher, Carolina partnered with many organizations to help her students grow culturally and academically. She worked with MCC Theater and Upright Citizen’s Brigade to give students access and exposure to theater arts; she accompanied a group of freshmen on a week-long Outward Bound excursion (her first and last time camping), and she collaborated with a prominent NYC street artist to help students create a mural in their school building. But her most rewarding experiences were helping her English Language Learners succeed.

Since moving to Cherry Hill 7 years ago with her husband and their 3 children, Carolina continues to be active in the educational community. She has her substitute teaching certificate and is in the process of becoming certified to teach ESL in New Jersey; over the past 4 years, she's been a member of the Fair Funding and We Return to Learn committees, a PTA executive board member, and a room parent.

Carolina is running on a platform of accountability, engagement, responsibility and timeliness. She pledges to actively engage with the community and make decisions in the best interest of Cherry Hill students.

Carolina is originally from South Jersey (she can often be seen wearing hoop earrings), and is committed to raising her family in Cherry Hill. When not advocating, Carolina enjoys cooking while listening to podcasts and going to the beach. Her name is often mispronounced, so impress your friends by saying it correctly: Caro-LEEN-a BEV-id.

Ilana Yares

6 Gately Court

Ilana Yares and her family have been residents of Cherry Hill since 2018. They moved to Cherry Hill from Cleveland, OH after her husband grew up here and the success and caliber of the school district brought them home. Ilana has always been involved in her children’s schools by volunteering for PTA events and serving on PTA boards. She currently serves as PTA President of Barclay Early Childhood Center, is a member of Zone PTA, and serves on the Pandemic Response Team for Barclay. She served on the district Ad Hoc committee for the bond referendum and has been a regular advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the schools and community at large so that all students can participate in a variety of activities without being excluded because of their race or religious identities.

Ilana earned her Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Psychology from Rutgers University and has been working in education since 2002. She is currently employed as the Executive Director of an educational institution, specializing in fundraising and database management. Although work is very busy, especially during the pandemic of the last 20 months, Ilana has been working virtually since 2018 with a very flexible schedule, giving her more time to devote to family and community events.

As a volunteer, Ilana oversees the operations of the Greater Southern New Jersey Food Distribution which provides weekly meals to the greater South Jersey community (open to everyone). On a weekly basis, over 2,000 children are given 7 breakfasts and 7 lunches at four locations over two days both on the East and West side of town. As the rules and regulations change for this program, Ilana is helping to work on a local grassroots campaign that is turning into a national movement to have meals continue to be offered to all children.

Ilana is running for the BOE at this important time with massive changes in the works for the community including a Bond, re-districting, and updates to the district's curriculum. These changes will greatly affect her children throughout their entire school careers with the district and she wants to be a voice at the table with how all children are taught in the district. With her deep dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as community collaboration, Ilana believes now is the right time to run for the board.

Ben Rood – “Transparency, Integrity, Progress”

330 Cranford Road

Dr. Ben Rood, Ph.D. is an educator, scientist, and proud dad of two current Cherry Hill students. He was driven to run for Board of Education by a hope to make things better for his two kids, Sophie and Aiden, and their peers.

As an educator who's taught at the collegiate level, Dr. Rood brings a unique perspective to education policy that comes from having led a classroom and screened applicants for advanced degrees. As the husband of a preschool teacher and father to a middle schooler and a high schooler, he understands the unique challenges present at every level of education.

Dr. Rood has spent over a decade as an academic research scientist, having earned his Ph.D. in neuroscience at the University of Massachusetts in 2010 before going on to serve in various academic and research-focused roles. As a postdoctoral fellow at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and an Instructor at Harvard Medical School, he studied the neurological basis of social behavior. In 2018, he settled here in Cherry Hill as an Assistant Professor at Rowan University's School of Osteopathic Medicine. This background has driven Dr. Rood to center his campaign around the values of transparency, integrity, and progress, and to articulate clear policy proposals backed up by science and evidence. In June 2021, Dr. Rood released his “platform for progress,” a compilation of detailed proposals to move education forward in Cherry Hill.

As a strong believer in transparency and communities working together, Dr. Rood has committed to consistently engaging with community members as a Board member, including through maintaining a public website and holding a town hall meeting with constituents every month. As a member of the Board, Dr. Rood will work to unite Cherry Hill's students, families, educators, and residents in a common pursuit of educational excellence throughout the Cherry Hill school system.