



Who We Are

Jersey City Together is a broad-based, non-partisan organization of religious congregations, non-profits, parent organizations, and tenant groups working together to address issues in our city. We work on issues important to our members and our communities -- in particular issues related to housing affordability, education, public safety, and criminal justice.

In late 2017, Jersey City Together began to re-organize and strengthen its education team, working hand-in-hand with parent leaders, parent councils, and PTAs. Since that time, we've listened to more than 1,500 parents in small gatherings across the city.

This non-partisan candidate questionnaire was developed by the Jersey City Together Education Team.

What This Is

Jersey City Together's Education Team sent out our non-partisan questionnaire to all candidates running for the Jersey City Board of Education. It is meant strictly for informational purposes. We do not endorse candidates.

We provided the following instructions for candidates:

Please complete the top informational section and answer the open-ended questions below. Please keep your answers to each of the questions to 100 words or fewer. Longer responses will be cut at the 100-word mark. Additionally, if you would like us to include a photo on your information sheet, please send the photo as a separate attachment on the email.

Jersey City Together is strictly non-partisan and does not endorse candidates for office.

In a few instances, candidates went beyond the 100 word limit. Where that was the case, we allowed them to finish their sentence. We then note on the answer if an answer was shortened.

We have compiled answers using the order in which candidates are placed on the ballot.

We have kept candidates' responses to one page.

If you have questions or concerns, you can reach out to our education team by emailing education@njtogether.org.

Candidate Name: Paula J. Jones

Ballot Position: 1F

Slate (if applicable): Education Matters

Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

I am seeking a seat on the JCBOE because I believe in quality Public Education for current and future students. As an effective communicator and active listener, I feel confident that I can assist creating a campaign platform that is organized with schedule priorities. As a retired educator of 34 from the JCPS and working within the community since the mid 70's, I bring much experience. My collaboration with other community leaders, teachers, parents, stakeholders and students will create stronger ties that will ultimately benefit our students.



What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

A number one priority is to ensure that guidelines from the CDC are being implemented and maintained within the school. Mask wearing is essential in preventing Covid -19, as well as physical distancing. Suggestion of getting vaccinated or tested routinely should be considered. Buildings need to be checked for proper ventilation. Measures should be taken to make sure that common areas, equipment and personal workspaces are cleaned daily and sanitized.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

The three biggest problems I see are (1) Staffing (2) Social distancing (3) Student learning lost.

1. District should offer competitive or comparison pay. Many teachers suffered financial loss during the pandemic because the after school jobs they had to supplement income was no longer there.
2. A layered prevention strategy will have to be applied within individual buildings.
3. Utilize government funding to provide tutors or after school programs to aid in students who suffered academic loss.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

I would encourage use of the American Rescue Plan, restrict abatements given to companies, and utilize various government grants which defend public school missions. The city needs to allocate proper funds. Board members along with community leaders and stakeholders must hold the city's administration accountable. Joining together with the superintendent should have merit. The future of each student who is underserved by inadequate funding affects the city in numerous ways.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

Board trustees must determine the school district's mission and purpose are being met, determine financial priorities, ensure accountability expenditures and all policies are being met, as well as, make sure the schools have all the resources needed to serve students effectively.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

Many students with disabilities are not going to college or college ready. I would like to see more vocational programs instilled that will expose students with disabilities to occupations that may be more attainable. Current practices must be reviewed and modified in order to successfully raise achievement for students with disabilities. We must focus on students' outcomes, not inputs. In addition, a life skills

curriculum should be given to students who may require help in adjusting to the real world. Various sensitivity training regarding special students should be implemented.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

The following are actions that may address inequities within the district's schools:

- (1) Invest more resources in schools that are in low income areas. This will aid in supporting students that may be disadvantaged and bring them up to the same opportunity as their peers where resources are more available.
- (2) To bridge the achievement gap, acquire funding for after school or Saturday tutoring.
- (3) Assess the situation and get a clear picture of where students need support.

Candidate Name: Younass Mohamed Barkouch

Ballot Position: 2F

Slate (if applicable): Education Matters



Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

When Mussab was first elected to the Jersey City Board of Education in 2017 as a full-time college student, it showed that the public supported the need for students to have direct representation within the board, and it inspired me. As a result of that inspiration, I received funding from Rutgers University to investigate and identify educational inequity in JCPS by analyzing the data provided by the NJDOE. My research exposed me to federal, state, and local educational policy, public and private grant opportunities, and modern initiatives designed to combat educational inequity.

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

The main priorities should be to ensure the safety of students, parents, teachers, and staff by following the guidelines provided by the CDC and state government while also addressing the academic, social, and mental health impacts of COVID-19 on students. To achieve this, we must fully utilize the funds granted by the American Rescue Plan to provide schools with effective personal protective equipment, adequate ventilation, clean water bottle filling stations, and targeted mental health services (for both students and teachers), and special needs services.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

- Ensuring students who are continuing their education in JCPS do not fall behind due to remote learning difficulties by utilizing supplemental online educational resources like Khan Academy.
- Ensuring high school students have the skills and knowledge necessary for college by working with the NJ Council of Community Colleges to provide summer courses designed to help at-risk students achieve college readiness and college credits at no cost.
- Lessening the budget deficit and fully funding schools by utilizing federal, non-profit, and private education-related grants while pressuring the state to reevaluate its school funding formula, which has caused the district to lose necessary state aid.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

The current state formula is not perfect, and as a result, Jersey City and other school districts have suffered from school aid cuts under the guise of a more "equitable" distribution of state aid. I plan to protest the state's actions and ensure that Jersey City schools receive the state support they require. Until the school aid cuts are resolved, the board must secure payroll and property tax revenue by encouraging city officials to conduct annual audits. I am also in support of Natalia's idea of pursuing non-profit revenue sources.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

The most important responsibility of the board of education trustees is to work together as a nine-member team and not as individuals with their own personal agendas. As a properly functioning team, the board can develop and adopt policies and curriculum that benefit students. The board must work together as a team to ensure the superintendent has the necessary resources to run the schools, and the board must prioritize communication for the schools to function efficiently,

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

I hope to utilize the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) American Rescue Plan supplemental funds, which assists states in providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities ages 3 through 2 (IDEA Part B) to aid special needs students during the ongoing pandemic. I also believe that special education classes should be reevaluated to provide targeted support to students with different needs, not simply a “one size fits all” curriculum.

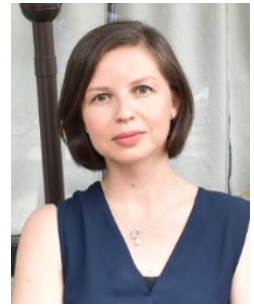
What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

- The Jersey City school district must begin releasing annual school performance reports similar to that of the NJ Department of Education to ensure relevant and accurate data influence school policy.
- Conduct a quarterly survey among students, teachers, and parents to collect qualitative data that identifies their needs and concerns to develop policy relevant to schools.
- Prioritize the dispersion of school-related information to parents in a manner that is clear and accessible for all.

Candidate Name: Natalia Ioffe

Ballot Position: 3F

Slate (if applicable): Education Matters



Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

I was motivated to run for JCBOE as a result of being a public school parent volunteer. Serving as a parent council leader since 2013, I have had an opportunity to make decisions that helped generate non-profit revenues for a public school, be active in infrastructure improvements, and engage in school funding advocacy on city and state level. I have been able to successfully train other parent leaders to continue this type of work. If elected, I aspire to amplify these efforts on a district-wide scale.

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

Making sure that the American Rescue Plan funds (ex: Elementary and Secondary Emergency Education Fund) are utilized and effectively applied to improving health conditions in the classrooms. We must seize every opportunity as it pertains to pandemic relief funds and apply them toward school infrastructure; whether its air quality inside the schools, open space during recess, or additional health and special needs services to students and families. Perhaps those funds can help mitigate the current staffing shortage of instructional staff and nurses in the district.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

1. Effectively closing the learning gap that many students experienced during the pandemic (whether due to circumstances at home or due to learning difficulties), by continuing the summer learning, "Teacher on-call" and ensuring each student has the learning tools needed.
2. Ensuring that the schools are fully staffed with qualified personnel, by increasing starting wages if possible, and through vigorous recruitment.
3. Drawing additional / alternative sources of revenue for the district, by launching the JCBOE Educational Fund, as well as try to challenge the state's negative perception of JCPS and attempt to reverse some of the deep cuts.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

Ensure that supplemental revenues (payroll tax) are certified, and any additional non-profit revenue sources can be secured, prior to the start of the spring budget discussions. Resume the dialogue with the state leadership. Some of the criticisms directed at Jersey City from the state included abatements, and lack of self-sufficiency. Since the deep cuts were instituted, abatements have supposedly stopped, and payroll tax was implemented. Our schools have been affected by the pandemic and recent natural disasters. Things are not what they were in 2018, and it is time to resume advocacy with the state to Stop the Cuts.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

Outside of board meetings and discussions in specified departmental committees, JCBOE trustees are not authorized to engage any district employee except the Superintendent. As the CEO of the school district, the Superintendent must ensure that the schools are adequately equipped and well managed. JCBOE trustees must in turn ensure that the Superintendent has all the necessary tools to do this job, but most importantly - that she or he is fully transparent and accountable to the board and the community at large.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

I hope to be able to utilize the American Rescue Plan (ESSER) funds to improve classroom conditions for special needs students, especially since their ability to learn may depend on their health conditions and surrounding environment. With that in mind - quality of air, space to safely move around, specialized learning tools, sensory equipment - all become essential. Also, and perhaps most importantly, I would work on recruitment of much needed special education instructors and nursing staff, of which there seems to be a shortage in our district. Filling those vacancies should be a priority.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

1. Conduct a survey among the staff and parents of each JCPS school. Analyze the data and identify top needs and concerns that are common to all schools, and create a plan to address specific ones.
2. Bring back a modified version of the JCPS Symposium (can be virtual) in which each school has a delegation made up of parents, students and staff, allowing each school to be equitably represented and given a voice.
3. Create a support framework for parent groups in JCPS, to ensure each has the tools they need to support their school and advocate for their kids.

Candidate Name: Doris ("Toni") Ervin

Ballot Position: 4F

Slate (if applicable): Change for Children



Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

As a Professor of Child Development, I understand Trauma in children's lives (pandemic/social unrest/isolation) can impact their mental and emotional state. I know what is needed and what works when it comes to child learning. With over 30 years of experience as an educator in early childhood development and a long line of educators in JC public schools, I know the right questions to ask and make the right changes that will benefit all the children in Jersey City. I understand the data and bring a unique and critical voice to the board.

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

Our children, parents, and teachers suffered real trauma from the isolation that the pandemic caused. Most of our children suffered significant learning losses brought about by the pandemic. I don't want our past challenges to continue to impact our children's future. When elected, my priorities are to apply my teachings and techniques as a childhood development professor to ensure our schools utilize proven strategies. It means providing access to training and development for our teachers and parents, stronger support teams for our students and families, and providing the right resources so our children are ready to learn and our teachers have the support they need.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

We are seeing trauma, learning loss, and support and resources for the children and teachers

These issues are closely related and dealing with them is critical in getting our students back on track. One of the Board's most important responsibilities is to set priorities for the administration and then ensure that those priorities are met. I will share proven techniques from child development studies focused on these issues with the Board and the administration to set benchmarks to guide the administration and hold them accountable. I will also work with the Board to better understand whether the results presented by the administration meet our expectations and how we can do better.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

We must work with the city and taxpayers to put our schools on the road to stable, reliable, and independent funding. That means ensuring that taxes dedicated to schools are collected and distributed to them, fewer abatements and PILOTs, and any deemed necessary, the school board has a meaningful seat at the table. We all know that a good education system helps everyone in the city. That means that everyone must chip in and pay their fair share. The board has an obligation and responsibility to taxpayers to show that their spending is effective and efficient in improving education.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

Make sure we are continually improving education in Jersey City for all our children in every district. I want to stop our past challenges from impacting our children's future.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

In my field of child development, we know children with special needs require specialized services to succeed. Unfortunately, those services seem less important or not affordable, resulting in children

taking a back seat to other programs, which is short-sided since special needs students require more support from families. I will work hard with the administration to identify and implement programs proven to be effective. I will also work with other board members and the public to help them understand the importance of these programs, not just to the families affected but to the well-being of everyone in Jersey City.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

- Open and transparent budget and spending process by making it easier for parents from all areas and backgrounds to have a voice and seat at the table when developing budgets.
- understandable goals and expectations for each school, tracking the progress throughout the year, including spending allocations and programs.
- Invest in technology to help students access the best programs and teachers in Jersey City, no matter their economic status. It means having access to the internet and the necessary hardware in all students' homes, investing in smart classrooms to expand the learning experience beyond the walls of individual schools.

Candidate Name: Afaf Muhammad

Ballot Position: 5F

Slate (if applicable):



Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

I am running for school board because I was asked by Jersey City residents to represent the children in their families and communities.

I qualify to serve because along with meeting all the legal requirements, I have experience as a JCPS student, parent and volunteer, facilitating workshops and peer groups with organizations that serve Jersey City students and parents (inside and outside of school) and served as President of P.S. 23 parent council where I trained with SPAN to be a Parent as Champions for Healthy Schools.

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

My priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the pandemic will be gaining ongoing feedback from students to keep an open line of communication and gain insight to how safe they feel in school or if any obstacles (physically or financially or academically, etc.) have been created due to pandemic precautions. Many times precautions can cause other barriers, it would be best to communicate with students, teachers and parents to find out what should be priority in regards to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

Post pandemic challenges that are present now may not be present during my term. Any issues that are present when I am serving my term will be addressed in accordance.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

As a trustee I would examine the current state formula that has Jersey City Public Schools fully funded, and continue to support it.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

The most important responsibility of the board of education trustees is to evaluate policy implementation.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

As a parent of a daughter with special needs, whom attends A.Harry Moore, I will use my own and other parents of children with special needs experiences to improve special education and treatment of children with special needs

I would suggest committees made up of alumni of Jersey City public school students whom have special needs to receive feedback on what they think could be better in the school and ensuring equipment that other schools throughout NJ (that serve students with special needs to be their best) are made available to students in Jersey City.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

Three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district

- 1) Food quality and preparation the same across the district

- 2) Same learning tools and curriculum across the district (i.e. iPad, Same brand of computer, digital libraries that can be downloaded, etc.)
- 3) The cleanliness of the exterior and interior of schools, classrooms and bathrooms. Assure repairs are made in timely manner to ensure safety for teachers and students. Both deserve a clean work and learning environment.

NOTE: Mr. Modi has not yet submitted responses. When he does, we will upload an updated version of the questionnaire.

Candidate Name: Vishesh Modi

Ballot Position: 6F

Slate (if applicable):

Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

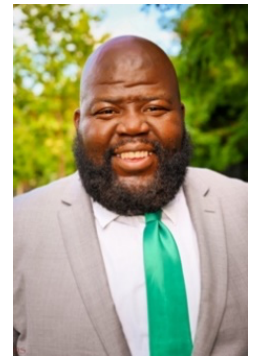
How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

Candidate Name: Thyson T. Halley

Ballot Position: 7F

Slate (if applicable): Change for Children



Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

I am a long-time advocate for students with special needs. Having a disability (hearing), I understand firsthand the challenges these students face. In addition, through my work as a pastor, community activist, and ASL interpreter, I have deep roots and branches into communities that have been ignored or not heard for too long. If appointed to the JCBOE, I will bring that voice and be the liaison to those communities.

What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

Studies have shown that the students most impacted by the pandemic are our special needs and low-income students. So my priorities will be to ensure they get the resources and attention they need and deserve to get back on track. As a pastor and advocate, families of special needs children and adults were heavily impacted. I will work with the administration and hold their feet to the fire to ensure that help reaches beyond our school buildings and into students' homes. That is the only way we can ensure that ALL our students can have access to opportunities for success.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

Special needs students, trauma, and learning loss.

Studies show the pandemic negatively impacted special needs and low-income students much more than any other group. The lack of knowledge and first-hand experience limits their ability to assess the impact of the pandemic on the students and their families. I will use my expertise to work with other board members and the administration to inform them what policies and resources are needed to get these students back on track. I will also speak up and work with the community to ensure they know and have access to their resources. That will bring education back better.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

We need to ensure Jersey City schools have a stable source of revenue. I will work with the city and taxpayers to ensure our school funding is stable. We need to make sure we account for all taxes dedicated to the schools are accounted for and distributed, and we have fewer abatements and PILOTs. The school board needs to have a seat on the board to ensure we advocate for all students in Jersey City. There needs to be full transparency on all spending to all taxpayers.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

To continue to improve education for all of Jersey City students equally, including special needs students.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

As a child, I had a debilitating disease that caused me to lose my hearing in one ear and a 50% in the other. I want to ensure these children receive the same opportunities to succeed. Unfortunately, so often, special needs students are at risk for lack of understanding. I will work with the board, the administration, and the community to help them understand the need for these programs to ensure the safety and education of all special needs children and families.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

- Open and transparent budgeting and spending process by making it easier for parents from all areas and backgrounds to have a voice and seat at the table when developing budgets.
- Set clear goals and expectations for each school, tracking the progress throughout the year, including spending allocations and programs.
- Invest in technology to help students access the best programs and teachers in Jersey City, no matter their economic status; smart technology classrooms expand the learning experience beyond the walls of individual schools; and good teachers throughout the district and providing the proper faculty training

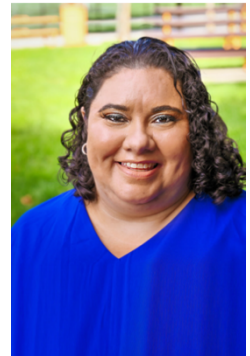
Candidate Name: Erika Baez

Ballot Position: 8F

Slate (if applicable): Change for Children

Why are you running for the Jersey City Board of Education? Why do you think you are qualified to serve?

As a current member and former PTA President, I have seen the same issues come year after year without being addressed. It is time we stop kicking the can down the road and work to provide quality education for everyone and make schools clean and healthy with appropriate staffing levels. I know how our schools work and what is not working for our children, parents, and teachers. I have a track record of working with the administration, principals, teachers, and parents to find answers and get things done to bring education back better.



What are your priorities in regard to supporting students and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

As a parent and in my role as PTA President, I heard the frustrations and issues parents and students encountered during this pandemic - from poor planning to indecisive action to ineffective communications to having the wrong priorities.

My priorities in supporting students and families will be to ensure that our schools:

- are safe and healthy for our children
- have the teachers and staff needed to get us back on track,
- provide the schools and families with necessary resources to deal with future outbreaks.
- make our parent's voices and concerns heard and met.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing the district post-pandemic and how would you address these issues during your term?

- Ensuring the federal COVID dollars are used to address the problems that have been festering for years and kept us from getting back into the classroom sooner.
- Addressing the learning loss of our students exasperated by poor planning and inadequate tracking. For example, not having the right software uploaded onto the Chromebooks puts us further behind in assessing students' learning loss.
- Getting the lead out of our school's drinking water. It is a travesty we have had lead in the drinking water in many schools for years. The time for excuses is over. Action is needed.

The Jersey City Public Schools are fully-funded (based on the current state formula) for the first time in more than a decade. What are your plans to ensure that our schools are adequately funded going forward?

It's a positive, but it means we must make sure we are using those resources smartly to get our students back on track and bring education back better. We are not out of the woods in ensuring ALL our schools and students have the resources needed to succeed. We need to work with the city and taxpayers to put our schools on the road to stable, reliable, and independent funding. That means putting in place measurable benchmarks easily assessed and accessible by taxpayers and parents to show that money spent will improve education for all. Doing that will get us back on track and bring education back better and more responsible to taxpayers.

What do you think is the most important responsibility of the board of education trustees?

Make sure that we are providing quality education for all Jersey City students regardless of income, neighborhood, or school.

How will you work to improve special education and the treatment of children with special needs in the district?

I will hold the administration accountable to ensure that ALL schools meet and exceed the federal guidelines for special needs students. That means adequate staffing and training throughout the district. It means going beyond the guidelines and listening to parents, teachers, and study teams to make sure we are making investments needed to provide the opportunity for students to succeed. Finally, I will work with the administration to ensure all parents know the programs available to their children and make accessing them more accessible. That is how we make sure we are bringing education back better to everyone.

What are three actions the district can take to address inequities between different schools in the district?

We need to:

- Have an open and transparent budgeting and spending process to make it easier for all parents to have a voice and seat at the table when developing budgets.
- Set goals and expectations for each school, tracking the progress throughout the year, including spending allocations and programs.
- Invest in technology for all students to access the best programs and teachers in Jersey City, no matter their economic status. It means having access to the internet and equipment in each's student home, smart technology classrooms and enough teachers throughout the district, as well as providing ongoing faculty training.