

A Plan In Motion



What would you write as the headline story about Forest Hills Public Schools in five years?

In March, I first mentioned the strategic planning process which will align our stakeholders who write the story supporting the headline of the future. The process is collaborative, forward thinking and action oriented. In August, two energized groups of parents, teachers, staff and community members met for facilitated discussions about the district's "current state" and are soon to gather again aggregating their thinking around the "headlines", if you will, that support our mission, vision and guiding principles . As promised, you can expect an opportunity for the broader community to weigh in on the winning aspirations for our district that supports excellent teaching and learning to prepare our students for the future. The result of this work will be a common understanding and enthusiastic support for the future of Forest Hills. I am beyond excited to be working alongside our Superintendent to see this plan in motion.

While the headlines in five years are energizing, the headlines of today are pretty inspiring. We are celebrating an amazing number of student athletes who have competed at the highest level in the spring into summer. Another awe inspiring Summer Stock presentation of Mamma Mia filled the stage at the Fine Arts Center in June. The academic accolades from current students and graduates continued to roll in with a couple newsworthy tidbits: over 2300 AP courses were completed by students this past year and our district consistently scores in the top 2% in math and top 3% in language arts in the state. Newsworthy for sure would be the gleaming new classrooms, furnishings, smooth parking lots, thousands of new technology devices and some very fine looking lawns, fields and playgrounds eager to be put to good use in all corners of our district. I am on the edge of my seat with my eye on our newsmakers for 2022-23!

Suzanne Callahan
Board President



Superintendent's Update

Dear Forest Hills Families,

Thank you for your support of our schools, staff members, and students. We have had a wonderful start to the new school year and I am grateful for everyone's role in creating the conditions where our students can learn, grow, and thrive! As we turn toward autumn, there are many exciting things happening in our schools and in support of student learning. As you will see in this edition of the Focus newsletter, the

November general election will include a few items connected to Forest Hills. First, the Board of Education has three seats for six-year terms and one seat for a two-year term up for consideration. You can find more information on the community members who are running to fill these seats included in this newsletter. We asked all candidates to respond to five questions. Please take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with these community members. We are grateful for these candidates offering their time and perspective to fill this important role. Secondly, voters are being asked to weigh in on the proposed renewal and restoration of the 1.0 mill recreation millage. This millage helps to fund our community education and enrichment programs for youth, adults, and senior citizens. This millage was first approved by voters in 2004. This proposal would shorten the length of the millage from 20 years down to ten years while restoring the rate to the original 1.0 mill. Please be sure to read more about the millage later in the newsletter.

This fall also brings with it an exciting opportunity to engage the whole community as we develop a new strategic plan for Forest Hills Public Schools. I am grateful for the dedication and enthusiasm from groups of parents, staff members, community members, board members, and students who have gathered to collectively paint a picture of our district's future - what we refer to as our "winning aspiration." We will share key themes from the sessions for community feedback. Late fall and into the winter, we will identify the necessary capabilities, strategies, and action plans to align our efforts. Our mission, vision and guiding principles serve as the foundation for all we do. The strategic planning process allows all stakeholders to align, articulate, and embrace our strengths to make our school and community even stronger for our students in the future.

Thank you for your continued support of all of our students and their learning!

With deep appreciation,

Dan Behm
Superintendent

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Meet the Candidates

NOTICE TO READERS:

The information contained within the "Meet the Candidates" section of this edition of the Forest Hills Public Schools Focus newsletter ("content") is for general informational purposes only and represents the views of only the indicated candidate. The content does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Forest Hills Public Schools ("FHPS") and the appearance of the content does not constitute an endorsement by FHPS or its affiliates, partners, or employees. FHPS makes no representation or warranty of any kind, expressed or implied, regarding the accuracy, adequacy, validity, reliability, availability, or completeness of any information contained herein. The content was written by the indicated candidate and included in the newsletter verbatim.



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Question Number 1

Please provide a brief bio about yourself. Please include your personal background and experience/ involvement with our schools and community, as well as what motivates you to want to become a board member.

ED ABOUFADEL

I am a professor of mathematics and a college administrator at GVSU. My family and I moved from Walker to Ada in 2006. My wife Kathy and I have one son, Zachary, and he was educated in FHPS for over a decade. He played on the varsity hockey team at FHC and graduated in 2017, and then earned a bachelor's degree at GVSU. My wife's sister and her family also live in the district, and they have three children. One graduated from FHN several years ago, a second is a student there, and a third is in middle school. I am a product of public education – K-12 schooling in Illinois and Indiana, bachelor's degree from Michigan State University, a doctorate from Rutgers University, more than two decades working at GVSU – and I embrace the philosophy that public education is for all. It is a path to an educated and engaged citizenship. Ultimately, as a school board member, I would want to be known for the following: Promoting excellent, welcoming schools, offering creative and evidence-based leadership, to help our kids to thrive and our democracy to prosper.

SUZANNE CALLAHAN

I grew up in Indianapolis and attended Indiana University for my undergraduate degree in Business. I earned my MBA at Western Michigan University. Grand Rapids has been home since 1991 where I have worked for large and small businesses in sales, marketing, finance and operational roles. For over two decades, I have been dedicated to

teaching business courses as an adjunct professor at Davenport University and Aquinas College. Currently, I focus on curriculum development and strategy for corporate training and professional development programs. My husband Jerry and I have three children who participated in the Spanish immersion program; we are a proud Forest Hills Northern family. I have served alongside and creatively recruited many fellow parents into numerous volunteer and fundraising roles within various PTOs, academic, and athletic booster groups. I am a vocal advocate for the Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation and served as co-chair of the gala in 2016. I have served on the finance committee and curriculum committees, and I am currently volunteering in the role of President for the Board of Education. I am eager to continue serving in a leadership role in my next term on the board and welcome new faces to our team.

ROBERT CRIBBS

A 20-year Grand Rapids resident, father, coach, and business leader. Married 28 years, father of two (both graduates of FHPS). I graduated from Southeast Missouri State University with emphasis in education. My career started in sales and marketing, later an executive with several companies. Selling my business in 2019, I've been able to spend more time at home and got involved with the community. I was active in Scouting, first in Cub Scouts and later an Assistant Scoutmaster. I'm a basketball coach for girls and boys at Central Middle School and Junior Varsity Girls' basketball coach in Wyoming. I'm a YMCA sports official for grade school girls and boys. I volunteer as a business mentor for SCORE, (Small Business Administration) helping small businesses. I'm a logistics sales manager for shipping from Asia and warehousing. I attended most all evening and afternoon board meetings to know about the school board and how it operates. After several months of board meetings, the same concerns

were being repeated by parents. The perception by many is that the board was avoiding the concerns by moving the Public Comments to the end of the board meetings and not having the superintendent address their comments.

HOLLY DEBOER

My husband Ron & I have been a part of the Forest Hills Community since 1996. We have three grown children that have all graduated from the District. During our time raising our children in Forest Hills, we both served together as PTO President for two years at Orchard View Elementary. I also worked for the district in a variety of aide positions at our elementary schools and coached Varsity Cheer and Middle School Soccer. Known to students as Ms. Holly or Coach Holly, I cherished my time working to help them discover and develop their strengths & talents.

KEVINN DONOVAN

Hello fellow parents and residents of Forest Hills Public Schools. I'm Kevin Donovan and I'm your candidate for the FHPS Board of Education. I've been a resident in Ada for nearly eight years and am the proud father of four amazing children. Two are currently in College and two remain at Eastern High School. From the classroom to athletics to extracurricular activities, they keep me very involved with the district. Much of what drives me personally and professionally was learned through the experiences and leadership provided by my parents. I began working when I was 12 years old delivering newspapers door-to-door. I funded my own education and am a graduate of Texas A&M University with a degree in Construction Science. In my 24 years of professional experience, I've had the privilege of being part of iconic projects that range in cost from \$5M to \$2.2B located throughout the United States, Singapore and Macau. My drive, determination and ability to see the big picture has propelled my

career. As a father of four children, I feel a responsibility for their future. I want to put my experience and expertise to work for our kids and community.

JESSICA JOHNS

Jessica Johns is a wife and mother of 3 teenage boys who have all attended, or who currently attend, Forest Hills Eastern Schools. She has a background in elementary education where she has spent time teaching and volunteering in classrooms in both Indiana and Michigan. She has a passion for creating excellence in education and is co-founder and director of a local nonprofit working with businesses who have donated millions of dollars in school supplies which she is able to provide to schools, free of charge. In her free time, she enjoys attending her children's sporting events, traveling, hiking, and spending time with friends and family.

DOUG LEE

I am a resident & small business owner in Cascade Twp. for over 25 years, have 4 children, all Forest Hills alumni. As a parent, my wife and I chose this school district in 1996 because of Forest Hills school district's top ten ranking and the parent/student/community efforts to encourage fundamental academic learning. In 2011, my family & I started Jam'nBean Coffee Company as a commitment to music and arts in Forest Hills. Jam'nBean was a revenue sharing program with the Ranger Marching Band. Students that participated earned over \$100,000 in student music scholarships. This scholarship program, with its' "Pay it forward" benefit, required students to perform 40 hours of community service each school year in the student's selected area of interest. This scholarship program's "Pay it forward" benefit, provided over 26,000 volunteer service hours to local charities and businesses. I am choosing to be a candidate because of the poor academic state ranking of Forest Hills 11th graders, the adoption

of the ideology of C.R.T. (Critical Race Theory), a 10 year decline of in-district student enrollment and school budget wastefulness. My goal is to restore Forest Hills to a top academic standing school where EQUALITY is restored.

CJ MICHAUD

I am a lifelong resident of Forest Hills, an FHN graduate, and am now raising my 4 kids in the district. My time at FHPS was filled with rigorous academics (that allowed me to enter college as a sophomore), sports, music, theater, and as many clubs and organizations as I could find! I now serve FHPS as a member of the Board of Education - appointed in March 2022 - and as a musician, playing in more than 20 pit orchestras for FHPS musicals over the last several years. My main motivation for joining the Board was and is to ensure the focus, resources, and energy of our community always stays on our kids. I believe the political ideologies, buzzwords, and distractions that have become the norm at Board meetings have no place in Forest Hills. I want to maintain and expand our position as a top-tier education system that delivers cutting edge academics and opportunities to students. I would stack my FHPS K-12 education up against any other in the state and want every family and graduating senior to feel the same way.

JACKIE NICKEL

As a former business executive, I've managed large organizations across multiple countries for Fortune 500 companies. In 2019, I opened, with my husband of 27 years, our first martial arts school in the community. Despite Covid-19 challenges, we opened our 2nd in October 2021. In 2020, I began teaching business at Hope College. Prior to that, I served as the Board Chair for Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative, a non-profit that gives children in vulnerable neighborhoods access to preschool. My MBA is from Northwestern's Kellogg School of

Management. With the help of skilled and caring teachers and staff, my husband, Eric, and I raised three sons who attended multiple Forest Hills Schools - Pine Ridge, Goodwillie, Central Woodlands, Forest Hills Middle, and Forest Hills Central. Our oldest son, Carson, graduated from FHC in 2017 and recently graduated from Hillsdale College. Our twins, Ben and Evan, graduated from FHC in 2019 and currently attend Hope College. I founded the Environmental Club at Forest Hills Middle, which is still running. I served on the Board for the FHC Rowing Team. Our family is very grateful for our boys' education at Forest Hills schools. School Board service would be a way to give back.

MALORIE NINEMEIER

I moved to West Michigan in 2015 with my husband after our first child was born. West Michigan was new to us, but we heard about this amazing school district and fell in love with the area. Seven years later, we are confident that we made the right choice to move to the Forest Hills Public School district. The district's guiding principles will build a strong foundation for our two children, as it already has for so many. I feel fortunate to volunteer as Treasurer on the Thornapple Elementary PTO, because I've been able to witness the behind-the-scenes activity of this incredible community of teachers, staff and parents. I am running for one of the six-year term positions on the FHPS Board because I am a voice for thoughtful and reasonable decision-making. I want our kids to have a well-rounded education, achieve their individual potential, learn to interact with this diverse world, and have a positive school experience in a safe environment. Forest Hills is a strong community, and I will collaborate with the other board members and superintendent to ensure its continued success.

QUESTION #1 CONTINUED: Please provide a brief bio about yourself. Please include your personal background and experience/involvement with our schools and community, as well as what motivates you to want to become a board member.

JUSTIN SHELDON

My husband and I have lived in the Forest Hills area for more than a decade. We love the area so much that we have decided it is our forever home. I am a product of public education, and I teach in the Integrative, Religious, and Intercultural Studies (IRIS) Department at Grand Valley State University (GVSU). As a Professor, I see the value of a solid education. I see the damage a poor education has on a student in my classroom every semester. I have a deep love for public education, and I can easily see in our community, the positive effect a quality public school system can have on the surrounding area. As a School Board Member, I can use my skill set to support Forest Hills Public Schools continue to do a good job preparing their students for college and practicalities of post-school life. I am also deeply committed to keeping our students safe, and to protect the integrity of education in our public schools.

BRIAN SPRATKE

I have lived in Forest Hills for 22 years, working at Dematic as a software engineer. I have three children currently in the Central part of the district, ranging from 4th to 11th grade. I have volunteered at the schools as my children have progressed through the district. I have been a classroom volunteer and worked with the PTO to clean up playgrounds. I have also been active with my son in both Cub Scouts and Boys Scouts. In the past couple of years, I have been an active volunteer with FHC’s Wrestling and Crew teams, as well as a supporter of the orchestra program. Outside of the schools, I have also been active as a board member of a non-profit that helps provide financial resources to other West Michigan charities in need of financial support. Through recent discussions with parents and teachers in our district, I have heard many points of view, and I feel we can work towards

common solutions that meet the needs of our students and staff.

MARY VONCK

Forest Hills became my home when I married in 1991. I grew up in a Chicago suburb and hold an engineering degree from the University of Illinois and an MBA from the University of Michigan. After working several years in engineering sales, I became a licensed professional engineer, and my company accepted my proposal to transition from employee to owner of their sales effort in West Michigan. My board tenure began when I was elected in May 2004. I intended to complete my board service when my term ended this year, until one of our trustees resigned in March, and we lost twelve years of experience, wisdom and history. Our board could thus be extremely inexperienced in January, with tenure ranging from zero to four years, pending the election results. In my 18 years, I have served under two superintendents and four board presidents, and participated in our superintendent selection process. I am happy to extend my tenure by two years to afford our board an additional twelve cumulative years of growth, especially as we engage in an exciting strategic planning process and support teaching and learning while confronting the reality of a teacher shortage and educators leaving the profession.

Question Number 2

What talents/passions/experiences do you possess and how will they benefit the board?

ED ABOUFADEL

At work, I am known for my fluency with policy and data, my organizational and communication skills, and my experience as a leader in several areas. I have been a key part of the GVSU’s team for COVID response for more than two years, and for a national scientific society I led a committee that created a policy to remove awards from misbehaving scientists (e.g., due to research misconduct). In addition, for the past two decades I have been the lead writer of blog that analyzes gasoline prices (The Gas Game). Education provides people with the skills and knowledge to succeed in our world. I am enthusiastic about seeing teachers and students work hard and move forward, and administration can help by providing resources, clear policies, fantastic facilities, and moral support. I have had positive experiences in schools, as a student, a professor, and an administrator, and I want the same for others.

SUZANNE CALLAHAN

Since January, I have been writing short posts on the district website in my role as President of The Board of Education. I look back and find words like innovation, curiosity, community and collaboration as descriptors of my talents and passions I bring to the board. I spend my days working with business leaders and hiring managers assessing skills gaps on a local, regional, national and international level. This better informs me of the world of work

in which our students must be prepared to enter. For over 25 years, I have been learning alongside traditional and adult learners in business classes where the best of academic thought can be applied to real world problems. Work, family, school are all intertwined for me. For better or worse, this is a 7 x 24 passion and profession for me!

ROBERT CRIBBS

Being an executive and owner of businesses, I have to be flexible and be able to work with employees and executive staff that have different points of view, ideas, and be able to address problems, and mediate issues that affects the operation of various departments and the overall company. These qualities are perfect to be a member of the school board. I am very transparent and will listen and present issues brought up that could be important for the success of the district. Whatever the decision is made, I will be available to let the community know what and why a decision was decided.

HOLLY DEBOER

Serving in leadership roles at Ada Bible Church through Lifeline Ministries and Thrive Women's Ministries have been a passion of mine for the past eight years. Through church ministries, I have also traveled abroad for humanitarian aid in the Sahara Desert in the refugee camps. Further teaching me compassion, problem solving and meeting people's needs on a daily basis.

KEVINN DONOVAN

Professionally, I've developed an expertise in budgeting, contracts and procurement. I've reviewed and audited \$100M monthly pay applications and have procured and managed dozens of multimillion dollar contracts on a given project. I'm no stranger of being a steward of monies entrusted to me and delivering the intended result. To accomplish this, I do my best to investigate, research

and involve key stakeholders while analyzing data to make the most informed decisions at all times.

JESSICA JOHNS

Jessica is talented at making connections with people and businesses who are passionate about supporting education. She is a great problem solver and loves to create collaborative solutions among stakeholders. She is a good steward of resources and understands unique challenges associated with allocation of funds derived from government and privately funded grants. She likes to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions when dealing with complex problems.

DOUG LEE

My 35 years of business experiences, 8 years on a non-profit Executive Board, community volunteer, father, husband and grandfather has prepared me for this next chapter--to serve on the school board. Somewhere along the way, common sense has been lost. When serving on the Forest Hills School Board I will be voice for the community of Forest Hills.

CJ MICHAUD

My number one passion is kids. I am a youth soccer coach, give music lessons to kids of all ages, and love watching kids learn and grow in the world around them. My focus will never shift away from doing what is best for kids, and every decision I make as a Board member is viewed through that lens. By day I am a cardiothoracic and infectious disease clinical pharmacist and researcher, ensuring patients are prescribed appropriate medications. The skills required for such work – objectivity, respectful conflict resolution, being evidenced-based, and being a lifelong learner, to name a few – are well-suited for Board work. I approach each situation with an open mind and a "listen first" approach and let my opinions be dictated by facts,

not the other way around. Finally, I believe I bring to the Board a unique and wide-ranging perspective: my knowledge of our Forest Hills culture and tradition goes back 30 years, and I have 17 consecutive years ahead with my own kids sitting in our classrooms. The FHPS community invested a lot in me, and it is an honor to invest my energy and homegrown skills back into the district.

JACKIE NICKEL

I have a passion for education. Whether it is teaching business to college students or managing martial arts schools, my priority is to bring out the best in every student. One of my proudest personal accomplishments is funding the construction of a school in Guatemala. My business experience with large, well-run companies has honed my decision-making skills. I teach a college course on decision making where I reinforce, among other things, the importance of data and diversity of thought in effective decision making. When making a difficult decision in business, I focus on what is right for the business and don't allow myself to be intimidated by more insistent voices. In the board role, my focus would be on what is right for the kids and the community. I have solid financial acumen and have successfully managed multi-million-dollar budgets. My strong decision-making skills would contribute to sound school board decisions. I have well-developed communication skills, as a result of my marketing background and leadership experience. I am comfortable having the hard conversations, but always seek to do so in a way that is respectful. These skills would aid in productive discussions with individuals inside and outside the Board.

MALORIE NINEMEIER

I am an accountant by trade, currently working as a manager of financial reporting at Spectrum Health. Throughout my career, I've gained experience in balancing budgets, analyzing financials, working together with diversified teams, and listening to others' perspectives to work toward important and common goals. Volunteering on the PTO, I've been able to work together with parents, teachers and the principal to provide our students and community with support and memorable experiences. I am passionate about strengthening the public school system. I attended public schools from kindergarten to graduate school, as did my parents, brother, husband, and now children. My mother spent 34 years teaching within public schools in Michigan and I have many public school teachers in my extended family. Every student entering the public school system should be supported to achieve their individual success. Schools and teachers should be adequately supported to facilitate this growth in students. As a board member, I would work with the administration to ensure we are fulfilling the district's vision of "all learners achieving individual potential."

JUSTIN SHELDON

As an educator at GVSU, I have had the unique experience of educating students from all over Michigan (and around the country) about the challenges associated with race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, people with disabilities, and different religions. These are incredibly nuanced topics that most of my students never experienced before entering my classroom. To get my students to understand these topics I must help them expand their critical thinking skills. This requires clear communication skills, ability to listen, empathize and outside the box thinking. As the topics I discuss in class

are politically related issues, I must first help my students navigate their political views, their parents' political views, and the unconscious bias we all possess. As a trained historian I was taught to do extensive research and analyzing documents on complex and emotional topics and to come up with a central thesis backed up by evidence. As a Board Member, I will bring this historian's mindset and will tackle every issue with research, analyzing objective evidence, and making the best possible decision that I can.

BRIAN SPRATKE

I am passionate about learning, listening to problems, and finding solutions. I want to hear and learn from a diverse group of district residents so we can all work towards common solutions. As a software engineer, I am often challenged with complicated problems where I need to gather information, work with other groups, and try to find a simple solution. Another goal is that this solution is implemented in a way to meet current needs, as well as be flexible with needs that change and evolve.

MARY VONCK

My passion is aligned with the district's passion, doing what is best for kids. My children attended nine elementary schools, resulting from boundary changes and their experiences in our Spanish Immersion program and Goodwillie Environmental School. I served as PTO president at our family's three elementary schools and Executive board member on Academic, Athletic, Band, Orchestra, and Theater Booster boards across two high schools. I currently oversee Project Charlie and Project Chuck, the district's substance abuse prevention programs for fifth through eighth grade students, I initiated and help facilitate our Academic Boosters' annual College Panel, and I launched and now support our Student Advisory Council. Having connections with the

Forest Hills community and the work we do has always been incredibly valuable in board work. As a board member, I have served on the Board Finance and Curriculum committees and as liaison to our Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation and played an active role on many district task forces and projects. I have thus acquired a deep knowledge of all we are charged with evaluating as board members: school finance, budgets, contracts, curriculum, state mandates, etc., all of which I can continue to pass on to board members through 2024.

Question Number 3

What are some of the current challenges facing public education in general, and more specifically Forest Hills Public Schools?

ED ABOUFADEL

Growth and stagnation is always an issue for public education. Thankfully, the Forest Hills area has been vibrant and growing, and that has helped us maintain our excellent school system which in turn continues to attract new residents to the district. However, other districts have faced declining enrollments and decisions to close buildings and eliminate staff. It is important that our schools are safe for students and staff, in a variety of ways. One has to do with physical safety. Emergency plans to respond to threats should be reviewed in cooperation with local police authorities, and a mock drill should be conducted. (Something more elaborate than the annual safety drills.) Actions like these will build confidence in the community about our response plans. Safety can also be about promoting understanding

and condemning bullying when it comes to the variety of identities that kids (and their parents) present. Our schools should be safe and welcoming, with freedom from violence and bullying; and freedom to be who you are. As a board member, I would be very interested in this issue. Pandemic response continues to be an issue, and school boards need to continually monitor the risks to our community.

SUZANNE CALLAHAN

Students: Our biggest challenge is and will continue to be anything related to students. Every day teachers and staff need to come up with relevant and rigorous learning experiences that prepare our kids for life beyond high school. Alongside this, there are myriad of factors from social pressures to economic realities facing a family or uncertainty about “what they want to be when they grow up” and the purpose of school. How to make school rigorous and relevant? That work will never be done because teachers ARE students and will always want to improve. Challenge accepted!

Staff: The dwindling teacher pipeline and an aging teacher population coupled with staffing pressure felt across all industries is a challenge that has been looming and is intensifying in magnitude.

ROBERT CRIBBS

There are many challenges that FHPS needs to address now and in the future. The district is currently very divided. Part of this division, I blame on the current board and administration. There is so much push on social emotional issues which effects student’s attitudes and behavior, “government mandated” programs like “No Child Left Behind”, classroom sizes, and the apparent lack of boards not listening to the parents and guardians. The parents have the right to direct the school district as to what they want for their child. (This is stated in the Michigan Education Code.) I am a big supporter of public schools,

but I see more and more parents taking their kids out of our district, good teachers quitting, and good principals leaving to pursue other opportunities. As a district and as a member of the board, I will thoroughly investigate all aspects of our educational programs, social emotional programs, and meet with teachers to get their input on how they can better instruct in the classroom.

HOLLY DEBOER

In moving forward for our school district, I believe we are faced with challenges that are in need of immediate change. As our culture pressures and tries to normalize dangerous concepts onto our children, we need to weed out a certain ideology that has infiltrated our schools and remove it.

KEVINN DONOVAN

The biggest challenge facing public education in general is the polarization of views of what public education should be and how we go about implementing it. With respect to FHPS, the biggest challenge the district faces is growth. Our district is successful and popular. As our older population moves out or down sizes, younger families are moving in daily. Finding quality teachers, land for new schools and even bus drivers are challenges that will continue in the immediate future. When it comes to addressing challenges, my decisions will be based on what’s in the best interest of students, parents and community (in that order).

JESSICA JOHNS

Some of the specific challenges that are facing public schools in general is that the traditional methods and subjects taught to students don’t always fulfill the needs of current businesses. Many students are being taught to memorize materials for exams but cannot always apply principles to real life problems and situations. Students are often missing critical thinking skills and other soft skills like interacting with

teams and coming up with creative solutions. More specifically, Forest Hills has a challenge with communicating their strategy to improve these skill sets within the student population. There is a gap between what the direction and vision of the district is and how that gets conveyed to the parents and students. We need to create more synergy between administration, parents and students. We all have the best interests of the students at heart. We need to find common ground where education meets the needs of the growing workforce and be able to effectively communicate how parents and educators can work together to make this happen.

DOUG LEE

The residents of Forest Hills have been extremely generous by passing all bond and millage proposals put before us. The Forest Hills community has prioritized education in our district shown by our unwavering monetary support. With roughly 130 million dollars budget left unchecked by us citizens has created an environment of spendthrift and wastefulness. This is easily demonstrated as we have 3 Assistant Superintendents, costing taxpayers over \$1.2 million a year and a Superintendent costing taxpayer over \$390,000/year. The least employee in the administration building costs taxpayers \$42.05/hour. All the while, paying our bus drivers less than half that rate. Last year, we had 636 bus routes canceled due to lack of bus drivers. Looking at the wage imbalance; it’s no wonder why. The IN-district declining enrollment has been masked with school of choice placements. Requests for maintaining millage and bond renewals just because we did it in the past has allowed wastefulness without good academic foundations being accomplished. My problem-solving skills and fearless attitude to challenge the status quo will benefit the School Board and the community.

QUESTION #3 CONTINUED: *What are some of the current challenges facing public education in general, and more specifically Forest Hills Public Schools?*

CJ MICHAUD

Specifically Forest Hills Public Schools? The number one challenge, in my mind, is the wave of misinformation and disinformation that has found its way into public education. This environment of manufactured controversies, and the social media platforms that allow false information to be amplified, has contributed to a divisiveness that ultimately only hurts one group: our kids. This is true across the nation, and it is true in Forest Hills. How do we recover? How do we refocus on our shared goal of doing what is best for kids? I believe the answers lie in open communication, transparency of information, respectful conversations, and good faith from a community who believes Board members and the Administration are acting in the best interests of students. I believe this may require doing things differently now than they've always been done. As a Board member, I am currently working to revisit livestreaming of meetings and create new avenues of communication where community members can learn about new programs, ask questions, and have a back-and-forth dialogue about what is happening in our schools. There is a level of trust that somehow has been lost, and I am actively working to help restore it through open and transparent communication.

JACKIE NICKEL

One of the current challenges facing public education is the unprecedented level of distraction students are facing. Covid-19 was highly disruptive to students and learning. Despite the heroic efforts of teachers and staff to transition to online learning, student academic performance was detrimentally affected. When the pandemic was at its peak, kids were isolated from friends and unable to participate in activities they love like sports and music. This took a toll on students' mental health. Thankfully, we are moving beyond the pandemic to some sense of normalcy. However,

even before the pandemic, students were faced with distractions from school. While devices make our lives easier in many ways, they also distract kids from important activities like studying, physical fitness, and creative endeavors. Time that previously might have been spent on learning an instrument, practicing a sport, studying or developing friendships may now be spent on texting, video games, or social media. The increased potential exposure to violence, cyber bullying, and sexually-explicit content has also contributed to increased anxiety and depression. Today, more than ever, it is critical that students focus on the most important knowledge and skill-building educational experiences; the ones that will bring them future success.

MALORIE NINEMEIER

One challenge in our schools concerning success and safety is the mental health of our students, teachers, and community. The pandemic has had a negative impact on our collective social, emotional, and mental well-being. Forest Hills Public Schools currently have many resources already available for students and families in need. However, communication surrounding what these resources are and how they are utilized needs to be more robust. There is a lack of understanding in the community of the true impact the pandemic has had on our students' and teachers' social and emotional well-being. Communication is key to explaining why these resources and why social emotional learning (SEL) has always been beneficial to students' success. Another challenge has been addressing misinformation campaigns. Understandably, parents and caregivers want to be aware of what their students are learning and why it's important. As unfortunate as it is to have to spend time to address false information, having open communication with the community is vital to curbing these concerns. Also, keeping an open dialogue between all parties involved

in the district's success, including administration, educators, parents/caregivers, and students, can aid in preventing these types of concerns from surfacing in the first place.

JUSTIN SHELDON

1) FUNDING. Michigan shortchanges each student on average a \$1000 a year (Michigan Education Finance Study of 2016). This lack of support translates into poor performance in the classroom due to missing support staff, essential supplies, latest educational equipment, inability to properly support the less fortunate student and their families. 2) TESTING. The push to emphasize standard tests kills creativity. I teach classes at GVSU that are supposed to instill critical thinking skills to students, from the product I see in my classroom these skills are not being taught well enough in k-12. 3) LACK OF PREPARATION. Children are simply not prepared upon entering kindergarten, especially in the marginalized communities. ADDITIONALLY. The current challenges for FHPS specifically are how the district reacts to monumental world events that reach down to the school district in a timely, definitive way, driver shortages, attracting qualified teachers, ensuring teachers feels supported (to address retention) and safe at schools to focus on teaching (reading, math, core subjects).

BRIAN SPRATKE

As a parent, I see the many challenges my children have recently experienced. A big one is busing, another I see is a lack of or poor communication. I know that there are many other challenges throughout the district, but I would take the time to listen and understand the needs of the district. If I were to pick one thing to focus on from day one, it would be communication. I would like to see the district get better at communicating. Not sending more emails or memos, but getting better at sending out information.

MARY VONCK

Public Education has always existed to enable and empower students to thrive in and support the world in which they will live as adults. That world is constantly changing, and more change has taken place in our kids’ lifetimes than ever before. Where once students needed to learn facts and figures, current employers are now demanding 21st century skills: communication, collaboration, creative problem solving. We need to continue to support our students in discovering their passions and developing their talents in learning environments that suit their needs. Creating lifelong learners can only happen if our children are safe and healthy. Our generous community supported our recent bond and allowed for significant work to create safe learning spaces. We need to continue this important work. We also recognize the emotional health crisis facing students, before and following the pandemic. We are grateful for ESSER funding to support emotional health and learning loss and need to ensure we meet our students’ needs. One of our guiding principles is Open Communication, which was compromised through the virtual learning and meeting brought about through the pandemic. We need to continue to restore and enhance our communication efforts among all stakeholders in Forest Hills.

Question Number 4
How would you work collectively with fellow board members to address the challenges and opportunities in our district?

ED ABOUFADEL

To be an effective board, we must keep lines of communication open, building consensus as we address challenges and pursue new opportunities. For myself, I will do my homework before board meetings, think carefully about the issues and priorities, and speak truthfully about current conditions and future aspirations.

SUZANNE CALLAHAN

Our board is deliberate, collaborative and inquisitive about district activities. Long before I was on the board and still to this day, we make decisions asking “what is best for kids?”. If approving a budget item, modifying a policy or evaluating output from strategic planning work sessions, we will approach all challenges and opportunities in this manner. Forest Hills started a strategic planning process that continues this fall. “21st century learning” as Superintendent Behm references when discussing the 4000 hours of high school and ways we can approach secondary school redesign for a high impact, engaging, rigorous and relevant experience will be an exciting challenge. Another certain topic is the talent pipeline for educators. What can we do with young people so they consider a career in education? What can we do for adults in the profession to keep this a career of choice? The “collective” part addressing these challenges goes beyond the board including community, parents,

staff, and board members in various forums. I will be working side by side with the Superintendent investing hours of energy and enthusiasm for the district in the coming months. I am beyond excited to help guide this work as the year unfolds.

ROBERT CRIBBS

One example is the transportation department’s failure to have enough bus drivers to fill the routes getting our kids to and from school. After months of complaints, I personally took it upon myself to investigate why this is happening. I talked to drivers and management to listen to all comments. Why are driver’s quitting? Why are we not able to hire more drivers to fill the positions? After reviewing other districts, FHPS needed to step up with an improved wage, better working relationship between the drivers, management, and school administration, offer more support for what I believe is one of the most demanding jobs in the district. I wrote a respectful letter to the president of the board and superintendent regarding my investigation and what I recommended in support of transportation. I hope my letter helped. In the final contract there was a significant increase in the hourly wage. I attended the August 8th afternoon board meeting. It was announced that all routes are filled with a backup list of sub drivers soon to be available this fall.

HOLLY DEBOER

Our ability to reach across the aisle to really listen to each other helps us all to create a better learning environment for our students...who are our future leaders. I look forward to continuing to serve our community, our teachers and our students well through my current activities and community involvement.

KEVINN DONOVAN

I believe all board members should have the same interests, that being promoting the education and welfare of

QUESTION #4 CONTINUED: *How would you work collectively with fellow board members to address the challenges and opportunities in our district?*

students. As a board member, first and foremost, I will represent the interests of students, parents and community. I intend to bring their voices to the table to work collaboratively and collectively with the school board, community, administration and staff.

JESSICA JOHNS

As an advocate for education and FHPS, I am interested in learning what businesses see as gaps in the incoming workforce and how we can work to incorporate those skills into some of our educational practices to better support the student as a whole. I will work collectively with colleagues to make sure that our students are being prepared for college and the future of the workforce. I will apply my ability to listen, problem solve, and offer creative solutions to these challenges.

DOUG LEE

To work collectivity as a board, there needs to be an acknowledgment of some of the issues in the district and a willingness to solve them. There is a reason why parents at record levels are choosing to pull students to home school or enroll in private schools. We must not forget that this current Board of Education decided they knew more than us parents by repeatedly voting to mask your children and keep kids home to “learn”, despite all the scientific evidence to the contrary. This has directly help cause the depression/ anxiety crisis within our children’s community.

CJ MICHAUD

The current Board is a wonderful array of experience and fresh eyes, traditional leanings and new ideas, and educator and non-educator backgrounds that allows for well-rounded discussion. When we all align under the umbrella of “What’s best for kids?” I feel there is no problem we cannot solve and no stone we leave unturned. It is important for me to form my own informed, objective opinions, and equally

important to understand the opinions of the other talented, intelligent, and student-focused people sitting at the table. That said, I think the best thing Board members can do is empower and leverage those around us! We support an incredible Superintendent who has filled our school district with experts at all levels. In truth, it does not fall to the Board to solve all the district problems. Rather, when problems or opportunities arise, it is the Board’s job to ask the right questions, make sure experts (both inside the district and, often, in the community) have weighed in, and evaluate their opinions and data. Decisions that the Board makes, then, are not so much personal decisions and instead simply reflect what the FHPS staff, teachers, administrators, and community members collectively believe.

JACKIE NICKEL

Working collectively with other board members to address the challenges and opportunities in our district requires that board members work together in a constructive manner. This would start with the work before the meeting to prepare for the topics to be discussed at that meeting. At the meeting, it is the responsibility of each board member to share their perspectives, and I would encourage other board members to speak. I would listen carefully and respectfully to their views, including ones that are different from my own. Likewise, I would offer my perspective, even if it was a divergent viewpoint. It is important to have the right mindset when going into board service. I would bring the mindset that I am taking on this role to make decisions that are in the best interest for all children. At the end of the day, our job as board members is to serve the entire community, not just certain segments, by focusing on high-quality public education that develops every child.

MALORIE NINEMEIER

I view the school board members as teammates who have respect for each other and who work together with our common goal in mind: making our district stronger. There may be vastly differing opinions on how to handle challenges and opportunities, but the board must remain focused on the common goal. Once ideas are brought together and a collaborative decision is made, it is then important to remain a united voice for students, teachers and our community. The board’s best resources are the district’s teachers, administration and staff - these are the true experts when it comes to education and student success. I’m excited to not only collaborate with other board members, but also to include these individuals on our team, as they are the ones who work tirelessly for our children. During collaborative meetings at work, I bring all relevant parties to the discussion and make sure that we hear perspectives from everyone. Therefore, we need to include parents and caregivers as part of our team as well. As a board member, I vow to listen, to remain curious, to be respectful, to share my own perspective, and to work together for the betterment of our public schools.

JUSTIN SHELDON

While School Board is not a partisan position, it is a political one, to pretend that politics does not influence one’s vote, is an exercise in futility. If one is to be an effective School Board Member, they will need to be able to put political ideologies aside, for the benefit of our students and the integrity of the education system. As someone who has at one time or another been affiliated with both major American political parties, I have respect for differing opinions and views that are brought to the discussion table by passionate parents. One of the greatest tragedies in recent times is the deterioration of public discourse, and this has greatly contributed to the polarized times. We

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must make a concerted effort to find common ground. In the case of the School Board the common ground will be what is best for the students and the education system.

BRIAN SPRATKE

I consider myself a person that listens to all points of view and use them to work towards a solution that addresses the needs presented, with minimal complexity or cost. I would like to get to know the other board members and work with them to make sure that we find ways to make the district better and improve the day-to-day lives of our teachers and students.

MARY VONCK

I have been asked many times over the years what characteristics I consider to be most important in a board member. The traits I value ensure proper vetting of challenges and opportunities in the district, while honoring the governance structure so critical to board and district success. The board has one employee, the superintendent, and one basic responsibility, holding the superintendent accountable for educating the students in line with the district vision. The board also adopts the budget to support this work.

It is thus critical that we as board members are present for board meetings, educated on the issues to be covered on the agenda, and filtering decisions through the lens of doing what is best for kids, not personal agendas. This leads to the most productive discussions and best decisions. Board Curriculum and Finance Committee meetings precede the monthly board meeting, and I embrace and encourage the discussion that takes place in these meetings, where each board member uses their voice, and honors our guiding principles, to process board business and make the best recommendations for board action at board meetings.

Question Number 5

What is your vision for the district, and how can we better serve our students and families?

ED ABOUFADEL

Forest Hills Public Schools is one of the best school districts in west Michigan, and I want to keep it that way. For our kids, that means a strong curriculum – for those who are college bound and those who will pursue other passions – as well as safe schools, excellent teachers, and well-maintained facilities. Our kids need to be prepared to thrive in the world today, economically and socially. This includes understanding how our government works, how our society has evolved, and what are their rights and their responsibilities. To maintain a functioning democracy, these are necessary components of a K-12 education. To read more about my views, find my campaign page on Facebook or Twitter.

SUZANNE CALLAHAN

I expect Forest Hills to remain a “destination district” where families choose to have their children attend our great schools. Our employers know “great schools” are a deciding factor in attracting and hiring. Our families know “great schools” will give their kids knowledge, skills and abilities to graduate prepared for college and career. Our staff know “great schools” will provide them a professional environment where they can collaborate with other educators, have ample resources for teaching and enjoy a robust partnership with parents and caregivers in the education of our kids. Our students know “great schools” will allow them to feel connected

with fellow students, be surrounded by nurturing adults, and explore a host of learning opportunities where they can showcase their talents and will be challenged with high expectations. School represents the potential and possibility for individuals and communities and I choose to be supportive of and volunteer with people who are excited about the future of education. Our schools are the engine for the future workforce, the pipeline to new scientific discoveries, a gateway to great artistic and athletic accomplishments, and more. How could I not want to be involved in making this vision a reality?

ROBERT CRIBBS

Continued focus on reading, writing, math, science, history and geography. I have concerns when I see that our district ranking is dropping, as FHPS does not have the best reading and math results according to Niche. Not good. I want FHPS teachers to know that the board will support them to improve these areas. We need to listen to parents and guardians to be sure their voices are heard with the board and superintendent addressing their concerns. We need more transparency by having all board related meetings livestreamed, so parents not able to attend can take part in the meetings. Our world is changing, so we must be sure our students are ready for the challenges ahead whether going on to further their education or go into a trade. We need to prepare our students so they will be sought after by businesses looking for the best candidates to fill these job openings.

HOLLY DEBOER

Our greatest commodity in society is our children. Paving the way for their future by curating an environment that future generations will benefit from.

“A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in” ~ Greek proverb

KEVINN DONOVAN

My vision for the district involves safety, academics and measuring success. Safety - Students cannot succeed unless they first and foremost feel safe in their schools and have confidence in their teachers and counselors to provide for their health and wellbeing. Ultimately those who are in charge of their education must have the knowledge and confidence in all students ability to succeed. Additionally, the vaping, drug and alcohol problem that exists in our schools must be addressed. This is a problem that's been impacting schools for decades. Social media and the legalization of marijuana has only compounded the problem. As a community, we must come together to solve this issue to support our students, and give them a safe learning environment to ensure their success. Academics – The district's curriculum should be focused on enhancing the core education building blocks of Math, Science, Social Studies, Reading and Writing. As children advance through school, In addition to mastering the above, I would like to see all graduates from Forrest Hills Public Schools be able to speak a second language. Children in other countries can often speak three or four languages in addition to their native language.

JESSICA JOHNS

My vision for the district is to see each child as uniquely created to become successful in a variety of ways. While I STRONGLY support high academic standards, not all students are able to take AP classes involving complex math and science. However, those students still possess many talents that students taking AP classes may not possess. I believe we as a district have the capacity to create excitement in education that motivates students to pursue their own talents and passions that will help to prepare them for their unique futures. Seeing the whole child also means evaluating the mental health of our students and teaching

them the skills they need to be mentally prepared to be adults who often face challenging and complex situations. In summary, I believe we as a district need to continue to pursue excellence in regards to high academic standards that promote STEM as well as classes that expand beyond the traditional methods of rote memorization and repetition and encourage creative thinking and problem solving to best prepare them for the future workforce.

DOUG LEE

My primary vision for Forest Hills is to restore us to a top academic school that we once were. To promote excellence in education where we celebrate our students' differences and not marginalize them. Bring unity to our schools via equality replacing equity and the elimination of CRT in our student body.

CJ MICHAUD

I envision a Forest Hills that uses our incredible history of excellence as a foundation to become a leader in 21st century public education. I think this vision, in part, is already established and it will be the job of the Board to continue its pursuit, seek excellence in all areas, and create a culture of innovation that prepares students for life after high school. The bones of our process are excellent: We encourage and support innovation, allow individual classrooms and schools to pilot projects, assess the results, and broaden the most successful programs to the other schools in the district. Project Next, Project Lead the Way, and Gone Boarding are all examples of this where pilots were successful and expansion is underway.

Outside the classrooms, my vision for the district relies on strong communication and trust between the Board of Education, FHPS administration, and community. We all want our kids to be successful and lead meaningful, purpose-driven lives when they leave Forest Hills. If we keep

our kids at the center of our words, actions, energies, and programs, I have no doubt we will continue to set the bar for public education in the state of Michigan!

JACKIE NICKEL

My vision for Forest Hills schools is simple and focused: All Forest Hills students have safe access to the best education experience, so all students can reach their full potential. Among parents I've spoken with, many expressed that their children are getting an excellent education at Forest Hills. Of course, as with any school district, there are opportunities. A high-quality educational experience focuses on the fundamentals – math, science, history, and language. It uses age-appropriate curriculum, books and materials while also building 21st century skills like critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. Co-curriculars like music, athletics and art play an important role in building life skills like teamwork and self discipline. Every student should feel challenged and successful in school. The culture within the schools should demonstrate curiosity, kindness, respect, responsibility and accountability. Timely and effective communication between parents, teachers and staff, where all feel respected and valued, is of the utmost importance. Parents should feel informed about what is happening in the schools. If they have a concern, they should feel comfortable raising it and have confidence that it will be addressed. It would be my privilege to serve the Forest Hills students and community as a school board member.

MALORIE NINEMEIER

The district's vision of "all learners achieving individual potential" is a simple statement but encompasses so much. To me, it means that we are tasked to continuously search for new ways of supporting both students and educators. We now understand that students may learn best in unique

ways. The district's 21st Century Learning Plan is a positive direction our district has taken to shift learning to fit individual needs. It encourages students to take initiative and be independent thinkers, which will aid them in any path after graduation. To further support students and families, we need to engage with them up-front. Parents and caregivers know their own child's unique needs and can help partner with their school to provide the best learning opportunities for their child's success. Hand-in-hand with supporting student's unique learning is providing support for our education teams. The teachers in our district are valuable and each has unique gifts. We need to allow them to share these gifts with our district and help them achieve their own individual potential. Teacher burnout is a very real issue in our district, and involving educators in decisions that affect them and their students is one way we can address this.

JUSTIN SHELDON

My vision for the School District is one that: 1) Accepts parents, children, and faculty from all walks of life. 2) Listens to parents' concerns and makes data-driven corrective measures. 3) Is swift to act in dangerous times and will not be content with half measures

(especially when our children's lives and safety are at stake) 4) Will always side with the objective truth with an understanding that the objective truth is immune from the latest political winds. 5) Is completely transparent in their intentions, actions, and provides the public the rationale behind its actions. 6) Has a Board that will put students and education system before personal political and religious beliefs.

BRIAN SPATKE

For our district to continue to be successful, I do not think we need anyone to come in and change everything. I think we need to get better at our communication and start working on making sure our teachers have the resources they need, and our students leave the district ready for the next stage of their life. I would like to see our district administrators focus on the teachers and students, and make it easier for the parents to understand what they need to make this possible.

MARY VONCK

I support our district's vision for education: All learners achieving individual potential. I embrace the amazing opportunities available to our students, opportunities that continue to develop: Goodwillie Environmental School, College and Career Readiness Counseling, Spanish and Chinese Immersion programs, our STEM program, Project NEXT, AP Capstone, Project Lead the Way, and new this fall, our Gone Boarding expanded block program, to name a few. Again, for all learners to achieve individual potential, we need to focus on the whole child, including their safety and emotional well-being, as discussed above. We are then able to support our students in discovering their passions, developing their talents, and engaging in rigorous academic activity to set them up for happy, successful futures. The pandemic and other recent events have created isolation and division on a national scale, and Forest Hills is no exception. We need to come together as a community to educate our children. Through continued robust communication, celebrating our successes, and more means of bringing



Recreation Millage: Renewal & Restoration

November 8, 2022

Did you know that the Forest Hills Public Schools levies a recreation millage to help cover the cost of the Forest Hills Community Enrichment Programs? In February of 2004, the Forest Hills community approved a twenty-year 1 mill tax levy to provide funds to operate a system of public recreation.

Since the recreation millage will expire with the 2023 tax levy, the district has placed a proposal on the November 8, 2022 ballot for renewal of that millage and a restoration back up to the original 1 mill. If approved, the school district will receive approximately \$4.1 million in 2024. These funds will be used to help cover the cost of recreation programs, funding expenses such as programming staff, program materials and equipment, building cleaning and maintenance, utilities, and related administrative services.

A variety of recreation programs are offered to our community for youth, adults, and seniors. Below are some examples of the types of programs that are offered throughout the year. A sample list of classes and programs can be found at enjoylearning.com

Senior

Learning Cafes, day trips, restaurant outings, concerts, and other special events

Adult

Visual arts, fitness and dance, sports, cooking and nutrition classes

Youth

Dance, science and technology programs, cooking and baking, sports, and sewing

Aquatics

The Community and Aquatics Center serves our entire community ages six months and up through swim lessons, water exercise, family swim and lap swim time, and is home to Forest Hills swim and water polo teams.

The recreation millage also supports events held at the Fine Arts Center such as professional music concerts and stage performances.

The following chart illustrates the potential tax impact on two sample primary residences:

Property Value	\$200,000	\$400,000
Taxable Value	\$100,000	\$200,000
Current tax amount	\$98.15	\$196.30
Estimated tax, if passed	\$100.00	\$200.00
Net tax increase, if passed	\$1.85	\$3.70



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WHILE YOU WERE OUT – *School Renovations*

Over the course of the sunny summer months, while the school work settled in school buildings, the construction picked up. Our crews were busy renovating some of the most highly used spaces - hallways, cafeterias and a gymnasium. As students, teachers, and faculty made their way back to school this August, many recent changes awaited them. We made too many upgrades and renovations to list everything, but some exciting highlights include new flooring throughout various classrooms, gymnasiums, and other spaces, new lighting fixtures throughout, new architectural details and paint throughout including lockers, fresh carpet, and much more! Stay tuned to fhps.net and fhpsbondupdates.com for past and future bond construction and renovation updates.



Thornapple Elementary School



Orchard View Elementary School



Collins Elementary School



In partnership with our community, Forest Hills Public Schools will provide all learners with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to build meaningful and productive lives.