**TEN BOARD OF EDUCATION QUESTIONS**

**2023 Candidate Harmon Hoff**

**1, Why are you running for the Board of Education? If elected, what will be your priorities?** I have unfinished work on several School projects in my current role as Board member and committee member. The Building Project is underway. It is important for Board members to make sure all stakeholders are listened to, that funds are spent wisely and that work is done efficiently. On the Health Insurance Rates Committee I am working with our auditor to make sure the Health Consortium we use to save on insurance costs, manages our money properly. On the Finance Committee I am working with School Board Member Margret (Tina) Baker and the administration to monitor our budget. One issue is to ensure that one time Federal and State aid from the Covid era does not impact our future operating budget. Finally, the Board Policy committee is continually updating our policy to make sure policy matches our practice and all involved know what the District’s expectations are.

**2, What particular experiences or skills have prepared you to serve as a board member?** After one term on the Board, I have a much better understanding of District finances, policy and procedure. As former Board members advised me, it takes time to learn how the District operates and the effective role of a School Board member. Listening, gathering information and clear communication are essential skills I learned from both my lifetime operating a farm and my nineteen years teaching High School biology, anatomy and agriculture at Sherburne. I bring a unique and essential understanding of budgeting and financial analysis to the Board that my School Board colleagues have come to rely on. I have experience from managing a large family farm as well as being the past Board Treasurer of the Mid-York Library System.

**3, What is a school board member’s role and responsibility? How does that differ from the role of the superintendent or administration?** A school board member must be a team player who works to protect the future of public education. We have 3 specific roles. Hire and work with the Superintendent. Draft and approve School Policy and understand and approve the School Budget. We are not administrators, managers or workers. We do not supervise District employees. We do not micromanage District activities.

**4, What is the best way to address differences of opinion on the board or between the board and administration?** Listen and discuss. The current Board has always discussed topics effectively without turmoil. In the last three years, amidst Covid, budget concerns, new employee contracts and a $29 Million building proposal we reviewed multiple aspects of each issue to reach a solution best for students and the community.

**5, What should your school district do to better prepare students as citizens?** We must continue our focus on reading and math in the Elementary school. We must increase our focus on reading and math in the Middle School. Teachers, the administration and Links team have started this process. The High School and Middle School have increased hands-on learning across the curriculum including agriculture, robotics, building trades and coding. We must continue to invest creatively in these programs emphasizing use of current faculty positions and District resources. I would like to see a financial literacy curriculum added to these practical life courses. Administration working with current faculty to implement these is the most appropriate manner. Not all students will or need to attend college. All must be prepared for work and life management skills. Those who plan to go to college, need to know SE has prepared them as well as any other school in the state. Our range of AP, regents and technical classes makes this possible.

**6, What is the role of schools in teaching children about topics such as sex education, cyber-safety, wellness, and bullying?** Critical reading skills, including the ability to fact check, research, analyze data, summarize information and share alternate ideas non-critically will prepare students to deal with whatever significant topics they come across. Students should not be sheltered from real life issues they will confront as young adults and through life. Schools should not take a position on these topics but prepare students to evaluate topics for themselves.

**7, What are your thoughts on your school districts programs for special education students, English Language Learners (ELL), and gifted students?** SE has one of the most comprehensive Special Ed programs in the region. We provide education as appropriate for a wide-range of learners. The Board’s role in these issues is primarily to approve a budget that balances our own resources with BOCES programs to properly meet Special Education needs. Our wide range of course options and “specials” from Elementary to High School as well as extracurriculars from Chess, to Drama to Sports, engages students gifted with a variety of talents.

**8, What do you see as the major issue(s) facing your school district? Public education?** Teaching reading, math, critical thinking and relevant life skills are the major issues of school. The Administration and School Board must effectively utilize a mixture of State, Federal and local funding to do this. Remaining focused on these goals without distraction is the major issue.

**9, How would you determine your budget priorities?** I determine my priorities by listening to the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Business and the new director of Finance for information about program goals, spending and revenue. Our Strategic Plan set our goal as “Rigorous Academics and relevant life skills”. We must fully utilize all available resources to achieve that goal. We must spend money and use resources effectively. The Board’s role is to ask questions that reveal both effective and wasteful methods.

**10, Do you have specific suggestions for improvement in our district?** I do, but I’ve learned that as a Board member, my specific suggestions are not always appropriate. A Board member must ask themselves, is my suggestion about overall policy or budgeting - or am I micro-managing someone else’s job? That said I have two suggestions that I hope the Board can consider with the Administration.

1. Parents and students regularly come to Board meetings with concerns about athletics. I suggest we implement a Strategic Plan for Athletics to clarify our beliefs, state a mission and Vision for our Athletic program.

2. Improve District wide communication using Zoom for student presentations at Board meetings. When student groups - FFA, Robotics, Odyssey of the Mind, Sports teams and Class trips, speak to the School Board, both students and board members are enriched and engaged. If we Zoom these meetings to the whole District, many more community members will learn of the vital work our students are doing. Even if public input is limited to a chat box, the Board will get more feedback than we already do.