

Jane Solmor-Mordini
Member Board of Education, North Shore School District 112
Because Education is our Promise

1. State your reasons for seeking a position on the Board of Education for North Shore School District 112.

I seek a third term on the Board of Education because I am committed to the work: I believe in the transformative and redemptive promise of education and I am dedicated to safeguarding the progressive excellence of our District. It takes many years of experience, successes, failures and distractions to hone a keen eye on the mission. It is unfortunate that the job is so challenging, many do not seek another term. At the most important time in our District's history, we are most vulnerable, having experienced an exodus of leadership under the weight of division, conflict, and lack of community support. We are a microcosm of similar growing pains, fear of change, and transformation across the country – but now is the time to take a deep breath, pivot a bit, and agree to respect one another for our differences, and problem-solve forward together. I am dedicated to helping that happen in our District and therefore, I feel a moral responsibility to use my experience to lend stability, consistency, and continuity that springs from so many years on the job, and seek another term. I can help fill in the blanks and avoid duplicating efforts and resources, avoid repeating mistakes, lend a historical perspective. It is unfortunate no other candidates are running for re-election because the learning curve is steep and there is simply no substitute for experience and no time to waste. I do not always say what everyone wants to hear, but my commitment is always guided by honesty, integrity, equity and inclusion, to achieve the best for every learner. I am willing to bring the grit for four more years, and do the hard work.

2. Describe the skills, talents and experiences you would contribute to your position.

Eight years of Board service has enriched me with an education as deep and robust as the one I remain committed to deliver every student in our District. I have the experience; I know the demographics, programming, buildings, finances, policies, teachers, leaders, laws, challenges and successes of our District. I know to ask the questions and where to find the answers. I am seeking to run again because I have spent eight years studying my strengths and weaknesses to this job well. I have strengths: doing the homework, critical thinking, drafting policies, advocating, steady vision, speaking the unpopular, and having thick skin. I have worked to improve upon my weaknesses, and have learned: to remember I can never know how it feels in someone else's shoes, to take time to enjoy when I am wrong, to appreciate passion and effort despite the way it is delivered, to respect others who bring opposition and integrity to the process and to know there is so much more to learn tomorrow. Service is rigorous, exhausting and rewarding. I am a better person for it, and I feel a sense of commitment to stay

put and lend consistency, continuity, experience, and stability to a fractured and very new team, facing a tough learning curve and a herculean task.

3. Write a brief job description of your view of this position, including the time commitment required.

The primary responsibility of a school board member is to identify (through research, experience and example) what skills are needed to provide all students with the greatest possibility of exploiting opportunities in the future. These skills change with time, circumstance, and politics. Once such skills are identified, the most successful methods of imparting these skills to a wide range of learners must be identified, understood and supported. The Board must then act with the greatest fiduciary responsibility to secure materials, resources, methodologies, and training for teachers, to insure that our students receive the broadest and most robust opportunity to acquire such identified future-ready skills. Today, that may mean coding in elementary school, cross-cultural competence, critical thinking and research skills, and diverse communication abilities. These skills may flourish with preschool and (all day) Kindergarten play curriculums followed by early learn-by-doing environments. They may require new hardware and software and they may be obsolete by next year. Board service is a fluid task changing constantly with demand, circumstance, skill set, flexibility and willingness. Time demands range from a few hours each week to upwards of thirty hours a week depending upon circumstance, willingness and commitment.

The real job is developing and maximizing problem solving skills and grit. It is impossible to anticipate the next near-emergency, but it will happen tomorrow. Such emergencies may include a single school, a single employee, a single student across the spectrum to the full complement of 12 buildings, 4200 students, 600 employees, 5 language programs, 3 in-house dedicated special education programs, over 40 languages in District homes, military dependent students and families, accelerated programs and resource programs, IEPs, 504 plans, 100s of bus routes, and intense resource draining foia requests and lawsuits. The job is a collaborative consensus building effort that demands accountability, trust, and respect for constantly changing teams, initiatives, and hurdles along the ever winding path to educational excellence.

4. What do you feel are the most important issues facing North Shore School District 112, and how would you address those issues?

The challenges of public school finance and our aging infrastructure have brought us to a crossroad. We need capital infusion, to redesign our District into a sustainable model and educational beacon. An overdue and desperately needed referendum to raise taxes is the easy answer. However, establishing two-way fact

filled communication and dialogue with the community is our most challenging issue. Understanding together that the problem is not facilities and finance, it's our constrained ability to provide a world-class education. Establishing leadership, continuity, consistency, communication and trust, will be tough challenges over the next years. We must work to keep our experienced people from leaving our District. The focus on facilities and finance overshadows the urgency we face to keep our educational programming flexible, equitable, and competitive to serve our children into the future, well prepared for college or career. It is important to exploit momentum to work together, as a community, and problem solve. I am practiced at navigating change, seeking consensus, making hard choices, and remembering this is not about buildings and finance it's about our children and honoring our future.

We are challenged to help our community understand that school finance is different from public, private, municipal or business. It is an arcane beast of its own, guided by federal, state, regional Board of Ed and other laws, guidelines, policies, mandates, tax caps, and union contracts. Due to many circumstances, our District is unable to recognize revenue to match our expenditures. When we consolidated twenty years ago, we lost out on an ability to borrow when necessary (just one of many complicated laws that frustrates our budget) and we can only raise funds through referenda. Delay in action by previous boards, combined with tough economic circumstances, makes our finances incredibly complicated and challenging. It feels like we are trying to solve a Rubik's cube behind our backs while wearing mittens. Smart consolidation and reconfiguration changes must occur to preserve the rigor and fidelity of our programing and our ability to flex and develop new deliverables as needs evolve.

5. How would you reach out and engage all members of the community?

In a time when immediacy is a commodity and attention spans continue to diminish, it is daunting to meaningfully communicate with a diverse population of stakeholders. No one reads the same paper, no one surfs the same sites and most people will not read a single paragraph of text, no matter the form of delivery. We teach our children to be inclusive, investigate their sources and cite from the text, but as adults, we jump to conclusions before considering the data. In our community, it has become easier to be dismissive rather than curious, distrustful rather than collaborative, fearful rather than hopeful. Anger and opposition have become a platform here, motivated in part by fear, which is manipulated and sensationalized in fictionalized op-ed headlines masquerading as journalism. We must change this paradigm. We are each responsible to make our community the best and to work together as a community, always in this pursuit. The community must partner with the groups working for it to develop trust, support, and a team spirit. Stakeholders must take responsibility to gather data, seek real facts, ask questions and work to find the answers. The solution is a two-way effort. We must each assume the best, not the worst, and we must

each take responsibility to exploit our individual strengths and work together to move us forward each day. Engagement is a partnership, not an entitlement.