

Hi Mary

Thank you for following up on a question asked the other evening during the SOMA Cares About Schools Board of Education candidates' forum of all candidates: "Who is managing your campaign?"

As you know, Javier Farfan and I are running a joint campaign -- Maini and Farfan for School Board. We decided to run together because we share a core set of beliefs -- that all children are capable of excellence, that students should feel welcome, respected, inspired and safe, and that teachers should be supported and encouraged to help students discover that they can, through persistence, curiosity, and self-reflection, become lifelong learners. We want an environment where students are active and engaged members of the school community, where excellence is not just an aspiration but a reality for all students.

We are not alone in those beliefs. Since at least 2010, I have been involved with a large group of local parents who have pushed for more equity in our schools, in particular in middle school and high school. It was during that time that I started regularly attending board meetings to figure out the role of the board and how to effect change, which culminated in my decision to run for the Board in 2015.

That work is ongoing, currently reflected in the implementation of the Access and Equity policy. Implementation is focused on reducing barriers to courses, increasing awareness of alternative course pathways, aligning curriculum to the standards and preparing all children to be successful in advanced courses in high school, supporting all children with in-school supports and increased access to teachers, and creating a school culture that encourages all children to take courses that excite and challenge them.

One of my proudest accomplishments in my first term is the Board's success in improving access in the middle schools to upper level math courses and providing parents and students the information and support needed to ensure that all families had access to the options. You no longer need to know the "secret handshake."

I am also hopeful because -- thanks to the Board's urging and Dr. Ficarra's effectiveness in managing the school district -- we are now making progress in the serious improvements needed in all processes in the Special Services department. We still have a long ways to go to make sure our students are served well in the Least Restrictive Environment (recognized best practice and mandated by law), and we need to build trust with our families that it is our goal to serve all children well.

I am pleased and heartened that the need for many of these equity measures for which I've pushed is no longer in dispute. I think people are beginning to see that this emphasis improves opportunities and experiences for ALL children. I read your article (in the Village Green) that emphasized that each of the candidates who attended this week's debate acknowledged the

need for the elementary school reconfiguration to achieve socio-economic diversity in all of our schools. I think that the conversations over the years around equity and inclusion are beginning to take hold across the community, and that is when real change will happen.

Why is all of the above relevant to the question posed about who is managing our campaign? Because we have seen these types of unproductive comments before. The implication of the question is that the person managing the campaign somehow dominates both the campaign and the board service of candidates once elected. This accusation has been leveled, in particular, against former school board member and lifelong activist, Steve Latz.

So what is the answer to the question? If anyone is managing our campaign, it is me. Running a campaign is hard work and all candidates rely on groups of friends and supporters to help them. These campaigns take massive amounts of effort and a lot of good people would refrain from running if they didn't think there were people to help with their campaigns. **That is how democracy works.** Steve Latz is involved, as he has been in several recent campaigns, but he does not "run" it in a way that controls the direction or goals of me or my running mate. As with all campaign volunteers, we appreciate his hard work on the many technical aspects of the campaign, including getting lawn signs printed on time, explaining to our treasurer, Michael Parlapiano, how campaign financial reporting to NJ ELEC works, helping with mailings and much more. Javier and I sincerely appreciate his work, as do the many candidates to whom he's provided similar help in the past. I am proud to say that our campaign has a large team of volunteers who share our vision but also bring a diverse set of skills and experiences to the table to support the campaign. They chair committees in a semi-organized campaign, taking care of scheduling coffees, organizing lawn sign distribution, doing voter outreach, etc.

Does Steve tell me what to think and how to vote? It is insulting to imply that a single individual on the campaign staff tells me how to think or vote. I have a Masters in Math Education, ten years experience at JP Morgan in senior management roles and I am the owner and Director of South Orange Country Day School, which my current and former parents tell me does pretty well for their children.

Our Board has always consisted of nine members with diverse viewpoints, both on what educational outcomes we want to see and what the district needs to do to achieve them. There is no one board member who can mastermind a decision without talking to and collaborating with other board members. Newly-elected Board members are often frustrated when they realize that they have to work hard to get their viewpoints across. Serving on the board means hearing from a variety of community members with diverse views on specific issues and using that information to work with fellow board members to reach consensus on the district goals, the priorities for the superintendent, and the message we give to the superintendent. And, most importantly once the board votes and makes a decision, regardless of how you voted, your job is to wholeheartedly support the decision.

Because I believe in and support everyone being able to run for the board of education, I don't want lack of campaign knowledge to discourage them from doing so. I have regularly shared campaign logistics information (like where to open a bank account and why you should avoid cash donations), provided education-related articles, and answered questions to many prospective board candidates, whatever their positions on the issues. My cell is (646) 226-8790 and my email is [learn@socds.com](mailto:learn@socds.com) for anyone who has questions about a specific campaign or a concern.

Javier and I look forward to hearing from parents and others across South Orange and Maplewood in the course of the campaign and to spirited dialogue with other candidates at the upcoming candidate forums on Oct. 10 (PTA Presidents Council/League of Women Voters) and October 18 (Hilton Neighborhood Association). We urge voters to read what we have to say on our website at <https://www.boe2018.com>.

Sincerely

Annemarie Maini, for the Maini and Farfan for School Board Campaign