

# Board of Education Election Spectacular

## Interviews with the six Board of Education candidates

### 1. What is your background with schools, education, and the ICSD?

**SETH PEACOCK:** I am a parent of three elementary children in the Ithaca City School District attending the Beverly J. Martin School.

**CRAIG EVANS:** I have 19 years of experience in the field of education. I have been a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and a district-level administrator.

**TOM FRANK:** I grew up in Ithaca and attended Cayuga Heights, Boynton and IHS (Class of '77). I majored in Theatre Arts at Cornell (Class of '81) and hold an MA and Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland. Currently I am the President of the Belle Sherman PTA and the Vice President of the PTA Council. I am on ICSD's Safe Schools Committee and the Code of Conduct Committee. I have a child in 1st grade and in 5th grade at Belle Sherman.

**BETH KUNZ:** I grew up in the suburbs of Albany and did my undergraduate work at Franklin and Marshall College. I hold a Ph.D. in history from Fordham University. Currently, I work in the Office of Human Resources at Cornell University. I have a strong commitment to education having previously taught and my husband is an educator as well. We both believe active citizen involvement creates strong public schools with educational opportunity for all. I am advocate for public school education and lifelong learning. My husband and I moved to Ithaca in the summer of 2003 and love the area. I am a parent of a first grader who currently attends CHES and I been involved in the CHES PTA. Since March, I have worked with Denise Gomer, the principal at BJM, to help implement the redistricting process.

**ALLEN LAMBERT:** \* Former six-year member of Board of Education. Intensive involvement in BoE for more than a dozen years and in ICSD for 20 years. Have been a substitute teacher in ICSD at all levels. My wife is an ICSD elementary school teacher of 25 years (Fall Creek, BJM, South Hill). Two children graduated from IHS, DeWitt, and BJM. ICSD committees I have served on include: Strategic Planning, Technology, Outcomes and Assessment, IHS Planning and Renovation, Drivers' Education, After School Program, Multicultural Education policy, and District Curriculum Council, as well as every standing committee of the BoE and numerous of its ad hoc committees.

\* Currently doing a comparative study of the operation of school boards as part of a Ph.D. program in Education Administration and Policy Studies. Previous Ph.D. studies at Cornell and Washington University in Sociology, Social Psychology, Anthropology, and Political Economy.

\* University teaching faculties at Boston University, Rice University, and elsewhere. Assistant Director of Urban Education, SUNY Albany.

\* Published on a wide range of topics, including development, environment, war, student protest, organization analysis, community design, social theory, education, economics, religion, and others.

\* 20 years creating/owning/operating small high tech businesses.

\* Lived in several other countries for a total of four years. Fluent in two languages, conversant in a third, studied a fourth as well as linguistics.

\* Grew up mostly in San Diego as the oldest of seven children. In addition to social science, physics, philosophy, and religion have been enduring intellectual interests.

\* Other community and education involvement: Padua Alternative Learning Center Board; Arkansas State Environmental Health Planning Board; Area Congregations Together Board; Southern Sudan Refugee Assistance Project; Ithaca Rotary Club; Producer and Host of "Education in Ithaca" a public access TV program.

**TOM CLAVEL:** I went to Belle Sherman and the old East Hill elementary schools, the New Junior High School and Alternative Community School through 10th grade, and IHS for 11th and 12th grades. I am married to a preschool special education teacher. I have three children; two are at Fall Creek, and my third will be in Kindergarten there this fall. I've done some student and volunteer teaching, and a lot of job training at restaurants, in carpentry, and data services.

### ★★★ 2. Why are you running for the Board? What are your motivations, and if elected, what do you hope to accomplish?

**SETH PEACOCK:** I chose to run because I was disappointed with the way the Board of Education and Administration dealt with redistricting. They failed to adequately explain why redistricting was necessary; they failed to show how their plan addressed the supposed problems; they ignored less disruptive solutions offered by the community; and they failed to develop a thoughtful implementation plan. Making matters worse the information shared with the public was poorly presented and untimely. Their seriously flawed redistricting process leads to a seriously flawed redistricting result.

If elected, I hope to challenge the administration and the board envision higher levels of expectations for the education of our children.

I want my presence on the board to encourage the board to better communicate with Ithaca's citizens, make better use of the abundant ideas and resources of our community, and better educate ALL of our children.

I hope to offer my particular perspective to the community to address the widening gap between the Ithaca elite who are generally well served by Ithaca Schools and those who must swim up stream to achieve success in Ithaca's schools.

**CRAIG EVANS:** I hope to bring my experience with and knowledge about education to the board table as an additional resource for the district. I believe that the Board is well served by those in the community that possess such knowledge and experience.

I also hope to help the board continue its work in becoming more unified and also sensitive and responsive to the needs and concerns of students, families, and staff. I also think that I can bring an additional perspective about budget matters, curricu-

lum matters, long range planning, with my experience as a school teacher and administrator.

I am concerned that the Board is viewed in a negative light by many in our community. I hope that I can help address some of those perceptions and serve to bring students, staff, and families closer to the work the Board does.

**TOM FRANK:** I am running because I am deeply committed to the value of public education and want to ensure that the ICSD continues to provide excellent education to all its students, now and in the future. My motivation grows out of a conviction that citizens have an obligation to serve in elected offices and represent fairly the interests of a constituency.

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**BETH KUNZ:** I always have felt the need to contribute to my community; it is part of my core character. While living in New Hampshire, I founded a grassroots non-profit organization called Family and Friends Play and saw the direct impact of concerned citizens improving their world. As a newer resident of Ithaca, I have been looking for a way to get involved and discovered the ICSD Board of Education through the redistricting process. Having attended a myriad of BoE events, I have developed a great deal of respect for the ICSD Board of Education and admire them for their commitment to the education of our children. This commitment to education struck me, and somewhere along the way, I realized that serving on the Board of Education was my opportunity to contribute to this community.

Initially, if elected to the Board of Education, I would desire to focus on the implementation of redistricting and making sure the process is a positive and successful one. I would want to sincerely investigate the issues of redesigning the feeder patterns for the middle schools and changing the start times of the various schools. My long range goals would include the improvement of test scores at all schools, making sure each child has fair and equal access to quality education, and that the dynamic programming offered in our schools not only remains, but flourishes. I am also concerned about maintaining the quality of education in ICSD without continually increasing the tax burden. I feel that ICSD needs to efficiently use its resources both physical and fiscal.

**ALLEN LAMBERT:** Public service in an area in which I am experienced, expert, and can make a substantial contribution. This is especially important for a BoE which will be the least experienced in more than 25 years, with no other candidates having experience and no continuing members with more than 2 years experience.

I have a passion for education and for school boards as a form of public service. There are numerous general and specific issues that interest me. I desire to contribute to better governance, communication, budgeting, equity, excellence, and program evaluation, efficiency, and effectiveness.

**TOM CLAVEL:** I am running for school board because I am committed to openness in government and to public participation in decision making. I think the board should foster collaboration among the school community and build connections to the wider community to generate

additional public participation in decision making. The School Board should take a leadership role in the process of opening democracy because democracy is a fundamental skill that has to be taught in school. Too often, kids are presented with a watered-down version of democracy in which they are asked to vote for one of two or three options that have been selected by authorities or "experts." Democracy is about participation in defining the terms of the debate. I hope to bring discussion out into the open, make clear policies, and ensure that district staff is carrying out those policies. Essentially, I believe that everyone should do this sort of public service if and when they can. I have the skills, and now that my kids are old enough I have the time to do it.

### ★★★ 3. In your experience, what things do you think the Board has done well? What things could have been done better?

**SETH PEACOCK:** I believe the current



board has done a good job at articulating laudable goals, and keeping their meetings cordial.

**CRAIG EVANS:** I believe the board has done a good job at setting and communicating its goals, and keeping those goals, especially around student achievement, at the forefront of their deliberations and discussions. I hope that the board will continue its work of program review with the staff, and not use that information to criticize the staff, but to use those reviews to learn with the staff in order to improve our services and programs in educationally sound and cost-effective ways.

**TOM FRANK:** Without a great deal of specific information on a host of issues, it is difficult to come up with an answer to this question. For example, a certain amount of

Board deliberations take place in Executive Session which makes their performance hard to assess. I will say that I think the Board accomplished quite a bit by working together over the past year without losing their civility, patience, and sense of humor. Their collegiality is by itself a considerable achievement and makes the prospect of joining them all the more appealing to me.

**BETH KUNZ:** I honestly feel that the Board did an amazing job listening to the citizens of Ithaca during the redistricting process. They spent numerous hours listening to members of the community and digesting their comments, questions and concerns. This board has worked well together in regard to accepting each other positions and being respectful of their colleagues.

Communication throughout the redistricting process was wanting. The Board and the administration realized late in the game that the landscape of Ithaca and its perceived neighborhoods were different than expected. I do not feel they anticipated such strong ties to the schools and individual neighborhoods. Also, I feel that the Board went above and beyond the call of duty. One must be careful to separate the board's responsibilities vs. the administration's responsibilities. In some cases, the board is being criticized for things that should have been done by the administration. However, hindsight is always 20/20.

**ALLEN LAMBERT:** Over what time period? During this school year this BoE has not done well on any of its major tasks (redistricting, budgeting, special education study and follow-up, etc.), either in process or substance.

ing the community in their work, although some have tried. It is not enough to allow the community to address the board: the board should partner with other community groups and activists, especially those with connections to the typically underserved communities.

### ★★★ 4. What are your thoughts on redistricting?

**SETH PEACOCK:** See response to #2

**CRAIG EVANS:** I believe that the focus should now be on ensuring that the students and families that are affected by redistricting are offered help in making the transition in the smoothest possible manner.

Many districts study the issue of school redistricting every five years or so, not necessarily to make changes, but to look at the capacity and programs of schools as population changes and growth occur. The fact the ICSD did not look this issue on well over a decade meant that a great deal of education and dialog needed to occur around simply the need to study the issues involved. I am very concerned about the level of rancor and divisiveness these deliberations have apparently caused.

**TOM FRANK:** I was very involved in redistricting this past year. I accepted the premise for redistricting and worked within the framework in representing the Belle Sherman community. At the moment, I am working on the transition for next fall and preparing for future discussions and debate on middle school feeder patterns and start/stop times. I think we can improve the process so that these discussions work better for everyone involved.

**BETH KUNZ:** My daughter is one of the children who is directly impacted by redistricting (she will attend BJM in the fall). When I first got involved in the process of redistricting, I was acting as an advocate for my child. However, over time, I began advocating for a fair and equitable process. A process where "poor" children were not singled out. I became an advocate for equal access to excellent education and how we as a district educate our children. For me, the process was a growth experience. I feel that now is the time to move forward. Redistricting of the elementary schools is over and now the focus needs to be on healing and on implementation. I think the Board and the administration learned a great deal about the community and process and that they will take these lessons with them as they continue to look at middle school feeder patterns and start times.

**ALLEN LAMBERT:** Some redistricting was needed, but it may have been overdone. Process was poor and outcome mediocre so far. The initial decision was defensible, but imperfect. Decision-making and design are not yet complete, so here's hoping subsequent work will be better. It would be fair to point out that it is unlikely that a random collection of citizens would have done better. The problem, of course, is that we expect our BoE (and schools) to be better than average.

**TOM CLAVEL:** As populations shift, it will be necessary from time to time to redistrict. I think that the board and administration should have involved more of the affected families and communities earlier in the process, should have had more of the data in hand from the beginning, and should shared the data and the process of defining the problem with the wider community. Redistricting itself is not my major concern: as I indicated above, the process by which the board makes decisions like this one is very important to me.

### ★★★ 5. What are your feelings on First Amendment rights for K-12 students? What should be the role of school officials as students read and express unpopular or critical opinions?

**SETH PEACOCK:** I am in favor of everyone's right to express unpopular or critical opinions.

**CRAIG EVANS:** There is a huge volume of case law on the issued of students' free expression rights and the responsibilities of students and staff. Students have the right to exercise their free expression rights, as long as it does not infringe upon the rights of others and interfere with the educational mission of the school. Administrators have the responsibility to allow free expression, but also have a responsibility to maintain the educational nature of the school environment, and allow such expression subject to appropriate time, place and manner restrictions. To me, the solution seems to be honest and open dialog between the parties that allows this delicate balance to be sorted out.

**TOM FRANK:** This is complex issue and does need a certain amount of analysis and policy review. I haven't followed this issue that closely this year but, if elected, would welcome the opportunity to review the situation and the relevant policies. I have no doubt that a mutually satisfactory solution can be obtained that respects the rights and responsibilities of students, faculty, administrators, and the Board of Education. I would welcome the opportunity to facilitate that solution.

**BETH KUNZ:** Obviously, first amendment rights are extremely important and right of every citizen in this country. I do believe that students should allowed to utilize their right to freedom of speech as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others or fly in face of the educational mission of the school. Although, I am aware of the some of the issues surrounding the *Tattler*, I do not feel that I can make a definitive statement about right and wrong here. I think a student run newspaper is a great thing and certainly do not want to end that as long as the students are acting in a respectful manner.

**ALLEN LAMBERT:** The First Amendment (in all its parts) is first for a reason: it is our most important protection and therefore merits the greatest caution in being overridden. There are some limitations, more for underage students in public schools than for adults in society. Court rulings establish right of school officials to oversee and censor student newspapers under specified conditions. Oversight should emphasize review as a learning experience and use problematic examples as opportunities to teach critical thinking and to improve judgment. The exercise of censorship authority should be reserved for the rare extreme situation.

But such a problem in ICSD is uncommon and seldom rises to the level of a BoE decision. The primary BoE role is the establishment of appropriate values, environment, and policies.

**TOM CLAVEL:** Censorship has no place in a democracy; censorship of students is wrong and unconstitutional. When I was at IHS, some friends felt that they had been censored by the administration for an article in the *Tattler*, and so they started an alternative paper, the *Young Plumbers Weekly*. I was part of that paper during its second year. I suspect that the administration (then as well as now) had valid con-

cerns about the content of the articles that they censored. The solution is not to stop debate, but rather to bring out more discussion among the student body.

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### ★★★ 6. If the job of teaching ultimately lies with classroom teachers, then what can a Board of Education do to improve education?

**SETH PEACOCK:** Most importantly the board should create conditions district-wide that allow teachers to effectively teach our children. The board also plays a major role in determining and communicating the direction and educational priorities of the district.

**CRAIG EVANS:** The board's job is to ensure that the district is attracting and retaining the best caliber staff possible. It is also responsible to ensure that the staff has adequate and appropriate resources to do the job. The difficulty is deciding what is "adequate and appropriate," which is where much of the dialog must occur.

**TOM FRANK:** The Board of Education can do much to affect education because teaching takes place in contexts, in environments, if you will. There are numerous factors that go in maintaining and enhancing learning environments that depend on Board decisions. What I would like to do is to work with the other members of the Board to ensure that, to the degree that we are able, we make decisions with the primary objective of ensuring that all the learning environments are the best that they can be for students to learn within them. That means, for example, continued support for the professional development of faculty and staff. I am totally committed to the idea of lifelong learning and a student's ability to learn outside of the classroom without the guidance of a teacher is, in my view, a critical outcome. For that to occur, we need to make decisions that allow teachers to teach well in classrooms where learning is valued for its own sake.

**BETH KUNZ:** The Board of Education must support teachers by providing opportunities for meaningful and lasting professional development. The Board should use the teachers as a resource for developing curriculum rather than allowing the administration to hand down curriculum decisions. The Board can work on recruiting and retaining quality teachers.

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**TOM CLAVEL:** The Board should ensure that all staff, including administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff, are committed to collaborating on education. I support and admire teachers generally. The Board and the administration need to work with parents, students, and the ITA to ensure that all teachers are doing their job well. We need to ensure that under-performing teachers get the training they need to be effective, and are not simply reassigned. Excellent teachers should be rewarded, and asked to mentor new teachers.