



# FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Dunne, Gibbons & Mascolo for Hanover Township Board of Education

## WHERE WE STAND ON THE ISSUES

### **1. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

- a. The Board of Education should not be overspending on legal fees to pursue political agendas. Stop wasting money on an unnecessary policy change that goes against the NJ Law Against Discrimination. Utilize our resources to meet the actual needs of our students.

### **2. PARENTAL RIGHTS**

- a. Our team fully supports parental rights. Parental rights should not infringe on others' parental rights. There is a careful balance. We trust our superintendent and staff are considering these topics and that we can find common ground.
- b. We reject the position that we can't strike a balance on parental rights and protections for students within state-protected classes. They are not mutually exclusive and they can be accomplished simultaneously.
- c. Our district has numerous policies and regulations that provide parental rights and notifications in many instances. We believe the board can find ways to implement policies that do not break the law, but also allow for parental rights. Here are a few examples:
  - i. 5550 - DISAFFECTED PUPIL
    1. "If it is determined that concern about the pupil's welfare is warranted, the pupil's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) will be called in and made aware of the problems, and steps to deal with the pupil's disabling attitude will be proposed."
  - ii. 5350 - STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION
  - iii. 5519 - DATING VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL
  - iv. 5530 - SUBSTANCE ABUSE
  - v. 5512 - HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, AND BULLYING (M)



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## **3. BOOK BANNING**

- a. Hanover Township employs excellent librarians who chose age appropriate materials for our school libraries that meet certain criteria.
- b. We need to make sure that children have the opportunity to prepare for complexities in our society and apply critical-thinking skills. They need the books in order to do that.
- c. We understand and respect that parents may choose to limit what their children read, especially at younger ages. But no parent should have the right to tell another parent's child what they can and cannot read in school.
- d. Every student deserves access to books that reflect their experiences and help them better understand who they are.
- e. We are troubled by the work of a growing number of organizations that are demanding censorship of certain books and ideas particularly featuring LGBTQ characters, characters of color, issues of race and racism, themes on rights and activism or biographies or autobiographies of people in history. This movement to ban books is deeply undemocratic and endangers tolerance and free expression. Now more than ever, we need to build empathy and understanding, so we can all get along.

## **4. POLICY 5756**

- a. Repealed in haste without adequate replacement. This was done with 48 hours notice during an emergency meeting, so the community was not given adequate time to digest their decision.
- b. Policy 5756 was designed to provide direction to staff and teachers, so they do not risk breaking the NJ State Law Against Discrimination (LAD). Even though the policy was not mandatory, the Law is mandatory and must be followed.
- c. Laws are not perfect and can be revised at the state level, not at the local level. The BOE is spending our school budget money to fight a battle in the wrong venue. This battle should be fought in Trenton by the Legislative branch of our state government.
- d. We plan to organize a committee consisting of parents, school counselors, teachers, LBGT+ advocates, and our legal team to create a policy that protects both parental rights and transgender students.



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## **5. CURRICULUM**

- a. Academic Excellence
  - i. Offer more resources for struggling students
  - ii. Develop targeted programs to close gaps and improve performance - particularly in math and language arts.
- b. Growth Mindset & Grit
  - i. Create a learning environment where children are challenged, encouraged to be curious, given opportunities to persist even when there are setbacks, and learn that progress is achieved through effort and evaluating and learning from mistakes.
- c. Fiscal Responsibility
  - i. Focus money on student programs that will enrich and support their academic needs and not on lawsuits dealing with policy disagreements.
- d. Retain Teachers
  - i. Keep highly qualified staff and reduce attrition by monitoring teachers' satisfaction through effective data analyses, support professional development, recognize and appreciate teachers' efforts, and encourage sharing opportunities so teachers can collaborate between grade levels and schools.

## **6. MENTAL HEALTH**

- a. Offer Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for students.
- b. Provide Mental Health resources, training, and support for students, parents, AND staff
  - i. Offer training for PARENTS several times a year in various areas
    - 1. Social media and internet safety
    - 2. Substance use awareness
    - 3. Burnout and wellness
  - ii. Early recognition is key in order to intervene and prevent bad outcomes
- c. Offer Volunteer opportunities
  - i. Model social and emotional skills like compassion, social awareness, and civic responsibilities



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- ii. Involve community businesses and organizations
- iii. Collaborate with local hospitals and charities

### **7. SAFETY**

- a. Review & adapt school security to keep students, teachers, and staff safe.
- b. Promote a positive school climate to foster conflict resolution and develop healthy peer relationships to prevent bullying, suicide, and substance use.
- c. Provide opportunities for volunteerism, so students can give back to the local community and benefit as well.
- d. Reclaim Hanover's reputation as a welcoming community with strong schools.

### **8. SPECIAL EDUCATION**

- a. Hanover Township is a small district and does a good job keeping Special Education students in their least restrictive environment and meeting their IEPs, but there is always room for improvement. We have heard from numerous parents throughout the community who are concerned and unhappy with the special education program and the communication regarding the district meeting their legal IEP requirements. Several of these parents have children who needed to be sent out-of-district in order to have their IEPs met. If we can supply our district with enough resources to bring back some of these higher-functioning students so they remain in-district, this could save the district unnecessary costs and keep these children closer to their parents.
- b. Fiscal responsibility will allow for the district to budget for special education teachers, aides, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and any other needs for these children.
- c. Another solution could include the creation of a Special Education Committee where the Director of Special Services, School Counselors, School Psychologists, Special Education Teachers, and parents work together to best meet the needs of our students.