



Photo courtesy of the League of Women Voters of the Morristown Area

Hanover Board of Education candidates Christina Dunne, top left, Brian Gibbons, top center, and Karen Mascolo, top right, answer questions from Louise Murray, bottom left, during the League of Woman Voters' candidate forum on Thursday, Oct. 19.

# Dunne, Gibbons and Mascolo participate in Hanover board forum

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EDITOR

**HANOVER TWP.** - Three of the six township Board of Education candidates were present for the League of Women Voters' candidate forum on Thursday, Oct. 19.

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The League of Women Voters of the Morristown Area, the **Hanover Eagle** and the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Morristown Alumnae Chapter, hosted the candidates forum for the grades K-8 Board of Education.

Candidate Christina Dunne, Brian Gibbons and Karen Mascolo, of "Focus on Education," headlined the league's debate,

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while their opponents in William McCabe, Christopher Mattessich and Michelle Stricchiola of "Students Matter Most" did not show. Their reasoning for not being present remains unclear and according to Voter Services Chair Barbara Kupper-Smith of the League of Women Voters in the Morristown Area, they did not respond to emails asking them to join the forum.

Incumbents Gina Marie Winkler, Lynda Wright and Marcella Wilson did not file to run for re-election.

To begin the debate, Zachary Serban, a Chatham resident who attends Regis High School in New York City, welcomed the candidates to the forum and introduced them via Zoom call. The forum was livestreamed on the league's YouTube channel and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuaV978HSOY>.

Louise Murray of Harding Township moderated Thursday's candidate forum. Murray is a league-trained moderator who is from outside the district.

Murray asked Dunne, Gibbons and Mascolo questions, which were gathered by the Hanover Township community through the league's social media. The questions were reviewed and some were removed due to redundancy. She asked the Focus on Education seven questions in total and all three were allotted one minute to respond.

## Opening Remarks

Christina Dunne went first to give her opening remarks before her running mates. Dunne is a retired educator and has taught for more than 40 years.

"Children have always been the focus of my life," Dunne opened with saying. "I have four sons of my own and two grandchildren. I

have had the opportunity to guide and shape the lives of not only my sons, but the many children that have been placed in my care while I was a teacher."

Dunne continues to want to serve her community in her retirement and decided to run for a board position due to concerns the direction the current Hanover Township Board of Education is currently taking. Instead of focusing on academic programming to close the Covid gap, she said, the current board members are focusing on changing policies. She cited changes to Policy 8463 that have led to litigation with state Attorney General's office as to why she was "outraged" and chose to run.

"I want to share my experience and knowledge as an educator, support public schools and teachers, re-focus our present board and give back to the community that I love," Dunne said. "I have the skillset and ability required to bring about this change and to restore Hanover's reputation for excellent schools, low taxes and a caring community that protects and nurtures all of its children."

Gibbons was next to speak, who opened with thanking the League for holding the forum, along with her running mates for joining in a partnership to move the board away from the national political spotlight to focus on local education. He also voiced his disappointment by the no-show by the Students Matter Most candidates.

"It stifles healthy dialogue on critical issues affecting all teachers, staff, administration, parents and most importantly students," Gibbons remarked. "I personally would never vote for someone who did not participate in a League of Women Voters debate."

Gibbons lives with his family in the Whippany sec-

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tion of Hanover Township for the past seven years. He moved to the area for the low taxes, the schools and to be closer to his family. Two of his three children attend middle school in the district and the other is in his senior year of high school.

Mascolo was the last to give her opening remarks after Gibbons. Mascolo graduated from the Hanover school district and is the daughter of two educators. She currently has three children in the district, with her oldest just starting kindergarten.

"I felt as it was my duty as a mother to make a positive change in our schools," Mascolo said. "My profession requires me to act with sound mind and logic while working as part of a team to keep children safe."

Macolo said she went from watching recordings of Board meetings online to going to the meetings to voice her concerns. She is "constantly disappointed with the amount of time and money our board is wasting on issues that do not exist in Hanover."

## Answering Questions

Murray first asked the board candidates how they have each prepared to become a board member and how they will uphold the ethical standards of being a board member. Gibbons said he has been preparing for the role for most of his professional career with 25 years in police administration and public safety.

"I have worked with children for a vast majority of that time," he said. "I'm a former teacher, or sorts. I have taught at the police academy for about 15 years teaching criminal law amongst other training programs."

Mascolo said she has had firsthand experience as a student in the district and the daughter of a teacher who retired from the district this past June. Now that her own kids have started school in the area, Mascolo has become more attuned with what is going on in the district and in the township.

She said she believes upholding all laws, rules and regulation in the Board of Education is vital to running safe and effective schools.

Dunne also feels that she has been preparing for the role of school board member for "a lifetime." She graduated from Bucknell University with a degree elementary education and a master's degree in reading.

"I feel like I am always looking out for the welfare of children and I feel that this is essential," Dunne said. "I bring a skillset of being a great listener, a collaborator and a great communicator and I think this will help me serve our community the best we possibly can."

Murray then asked the candidates if they were to win, how would they work with the incumbent members of the Hanover Township Board of Education. Mascolo said her profession has had her work with "very difficult colleagues" before and they call her the "diplomat" there.

"I am very good with coming together and meeting with people with different ideas and having us all get on the same page," Mascolo said. "Because all of us want what's best for the students of Hanover Township. I believe that the people on the board, even though we don't always agree with what they're doing, their policies and how they make their decisions, I believe that together, talking to the people of the community and that includes parents, teachers and

our school psychologists, we can all work together to create policies that will meet all the needs of the students while also making sure everyone's parental rights are met as well."

Dunne backed the comments from Mascolo, saying being a good listener and compromise is essential to working together.

"I want to be the bridge that pulls everything together and I think I can do that," Dunne said.

Gibbons said he respects that the current board members as they are volunteers and believes he agrees with most of the issues that come up at meetings.

"I think there is a small percentage of really complicated and controversial issues that I think have been spun into a frenzy," Gibbons said. "With using my negotiating skills that I have learned in active listening in my years dealing with people, I think using all of that and finding common ground is rather simple when you take the emotions out of it."

Murray then asked the candidates how they would evaluate the school's Superintendent with their individual backgrounds. Dunne said Hanover Township needs a Superintendent who is willing to listen to the community.

Dunne said she has worked with several superintendents over her years of teaching and said she can evaluate and work with whoever is chosen.

Gibbons, with his 17 years of administration and government work, said working with the other board members to hire a superintendent who is competent but has the character to perform their duties would be rather simple.

Mascolo said in her healthcare profession, she and her colleagues regularly administrate self-assessments and reports about

their coworkers, even doing reports on their higher-ups. Reviewing the superintendent would be similar.

"The superintendent needs to make sure that the vision of our schools are being met each year that the academic rigor of our curriculum is going to make sure our students graduate with a strong foundation as they move on to higher education," Mascolo said. "I look forward to the opportunity to evaluate a superintendent if we need to in the future."

Murray then asked Gibbons and the other candidates about enforcing policies that protects students and respects parental rights. Gibbons said this is one of the cornerstone of why he is running.

"The idea that they are mutually exclusive is utter nonsense to me, honestly," he said. "I think that we just simply have to work harder to find common ground, adopt policies that absolutely met the law against discrimination, that protect all protected classes and provide parental rights when it does not pose a danger to a child."

Gibbons said most teachers are well intentioned and want the parents to be involved. If teachers are trained properly, parents will know what is going on with their children in the school when it is most appropriate.

Mascolo said that parents are the first and most important teachers to their children. The district has plenty of great policies that provide parental rights for their children, she said.

Dunne agreed with Mascolo and as a parent of her children, was also very involved with their education. Developing a partnership with the parents and the schools is important so that their children can get the best education they can possibly get.