

Citizens for a Fair Ferndale (fairferndale.org) seeks to help Ferndale voters get acquainted with those running for public office. To this end, we asked all Candidates for school board to complete this CFF Candidate Questionnaire. CFF thanks our candidates for responding to this questionnaire and for their willingness to lead.

Ferndale Area School District Board Candidates November 2022 Election

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Why did you decide to run for school board?

I want to be a school board member for Ferndale Public Schools because I want our schools to empower our students, our educators, and our communities. As a K-12 alumnus of Ferndale Schools, myself, and current parent in the District, this is a deeply personal mission for me. In Ferndale Schools, I was always surrounded and supported by teachers and staff who cared greatly about their students, and a diverse student body who shared a strong sense of collective community. These experiences empowered me to live a life dedicated to the growth and wellbeing of others. This led me to a career in public health, health education, and mental health of students, which has given me a unique appreciation for how students' experiences in school are crucial in empowering them to live the lives they want to lead. Now I am returning to Ferndale Public Schools, with my own kids, to both give back and pay it forward -- to contribute to the empowerment of students, staff, and our communities.

For new candidates: What has prepared you to hold a School Board seat? If you are an incumbent: describe how you have contributed to the leadership of the district.

CFF Note: Ceglarek is a new candidate

The same experiences that have driven me to want to be on the Ferndale School Board are those that have also prepared me to hold a seat on the Ferndale School Board. My driving purpose in my life has always been to contribute to the empowerment of others. This drive led me to study developmental and cognitive psychology during my undergraduate career, with a focus on researching the contributing factors to the mental health of youth. While I was both supporting others' and leading my own research in this field, I went on to get a Master's in Public Health, specializing in health education and health behaviors. These degrees and my research career led me to join the Healthy Minds Network (<https://healthymindsnetwork.org/>), first as a study coordinator, and eventually as a lead research specialist and managing director of the group. There, I took part in evaluating students' wellbeing and academic success at hundreds of schools across the U.S. and

Canada, and turning that both into a body of national evidence, as well as feedback used to improve student mental health, academic success, and overall climate and safety for each school with whom we worked. On top of this work involving students and schools, I also was in charge of managing our diverse team of researchers and staff, was our main "spokesperson" and coordinating contact with other institutions and teams, managed our annual budget, and took a leading role in our strategic planning. Both the content of my research and evaluation, as well as the administrative tasks of my job, have prepared me to be a member of a school board. I am prepared to be a member of Ferndale Schools' Board, specifically, as a K-12 alum of the schools, with two younger brothers who went through the schools, a mother who has gone from lunch-aide to special education instructor in these schools, and a member of a family that is dedicated to this community. It has always been my intention raise my own family in the same community that gave me my values for diversity, grassroots community action, and self-determination of all individuals. Over the past year, particularly, I have spent a lot of time listening to folks in the schools, at our parks, and in our neighborhoods -- learning what has stayed the same, what has changed, and what people want to change. Once on Board, I seek to, above all else, continue the work of listening to all folks in our communities. My professional experience, my personal experience, and my personal value for the Ferndale Public Schools communities have all prepared me to hold a seat on our Board.

What do you see as the challenges and opportunities faced by the school district as it considers its future?

I see our challenges and opportunities as different sides of the same coin -- opportunities for us to leverage our strengths to address our needs for betterment. I believe we face many such opportunities, but one of the most pressing and significant challenges is that of our current educator shortage. I believe there are three ways we can work to address this challenge -- (1) doing everything we can to make sure staff are well-compensated for every minute of their time, (2) tapping into an alumni network for hiring, and (3) building a working climate that respects and empowers staff. School budgets are limited. That said, as mentioned in my answer regarding budget priorities, our highest priority should always be staff compensation. Being able to pay staff competitive wages and benefits ensures that we are attracting as many candidates for our job openings as possible. But this goes beyond base salaries and benefits. It is no secret that teachers and support staff work many hours outside the time students are in class. General preparation, on-going student support, meetings with administrators and colleagues, instructional planning, extracurricular facilitation, and so much more adds up to a lot of time beyond the 8am - 3pm frame. And this does not even include when we ask staff to get involved in strategic planning, policy development, and critical evaluations of our curriculum and pedagogy for which their voice is of the utmost importance. We must make sure that staff are compensated -- either in hourly OT or even in cash "incentives" such as Visa Gift Cards -- for every moment they invest in our schools. I believe that having a robust alumni network, as described in my answer to the previous question, could serve as a hiring pool for our openings. And with an alumni network that shows how much we care about our students, even when they are not technically our students anymore, we can make former students want to come back and work for the schools that cared for them. On that note, care for staff is arguably the most impactful thing we can promote to address the staff shortage. Whenever there is a staff shortage in any field, workers know that they can leave at any moment and easily find a job somewhere else. Staff in education know that the pay is not glamorous anywhere, and that there is only so much a district can do in terms of how much they can compensate their staff. However, they also rightfully know that the school board and administration can do a lot in terms of

policy and practice to value and support their staff. Just as students learn best when they feel autonomous, confident, and connected, staff teach and support our students best when they feel autonomous, confident, and connected. We must have formal procedures in place for gathering staff input in all major decision making, as well as grant our educators flexibility in creating their own classroom structures, curriculum, and practices wherever possible, to promote their autonomy over their work. We must have formal and practical modes of job-training, mentoring, and career advancement to build our staff's confidence as well as ownership over their career trajectory within our District. And we must have open, transparent, and continual modes of communication, cooperation, and even celebration among staff, administrators, and the Board, to ensure we all have a shared sense of connectedness and understanding in our united goal to give Ferndale Eagles the best education possible. If we are able to make our staff feel truly autonomous, confident, and connected at their job, we will be known as a place where staff are truly valued, and a desirable district at which to work.

What role do school leaders have in promoting equity in schools? How do you see Ferndale Schools moving toward racial equity?

School leaders play an incredibly vital role in promoting equity in schools, as they hold considerable influence over the culture and social climate in our schools. Leaders affect culture and climate in two ways -- policy and presence. School leaders can shape equity via a number of policies, including hiring practices, required professional development for staff, social-emotional curriculum standards, seeking community input for decision making, setting budget priorities to address disparities, and more. At the end of the day, every decision the Board and other school leaders make can -- and should -- be made through an equity lens. Our Ferndale school leaders recognize this, and therefore have made it the foundation of every goal outlined in our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. Beyond their power in policy, though, school leaders have power in their presence to promote equity. In the same way that leaders of nations, religions, movements, and cultures can be seen as figures that embody the values of those they represent, school leaders have the opportunity to lead by example, and demonstrate our collective value in equity. Being available to all community members, speaking honestly and critically about inequities we face and how we can address them, and co-leading, with students and staff, on-the-ground community engagement work to bring resources outside of our school walls and into our communities, are all ways that our school leaders can model what our values are, and how we act on them. I see Ferndale Schools moving toward racial equity by implementing all of the above strategies with a racial equity lens. More specifically, I applaud the steps taken towards our goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, such as working to align the staff demographic with the student-body demographic, training our staff in culturally responsive and restorative practices, and working to increase engagement with our historically underrepresented communities in our District. I believe the next step of this work lies in grassroots democratic engagement, and radical transparency and honesty. We need to recognize that as long as racial disparities are linked to economic disparities in our nation, then we cannot significantly increase representation of communities of color in our decision making without offering financial resources to bring folks from those communities to the table. Similarly, we cannot close disparities in academic achievement without offering financial and quality-of-life resources to all students of working and impoverished class backgrounds. And, looking beyond societal trends and specifically inwards to our community, we need to increase direct-representation of our students' communities in our staff, which includes prioritizing attracting Ferndale alumni to our staff positions, and doubling-down our current efforts to train and retain our staff who have been committed to the District and our

students for years. We also must make sure we are making our decisions based on what the voices of our marginalized and historically underheard communities in our specific District are saying -- our folks of color, of working and impoverished classes, of sexual and gender minority identities, in Oak Park, in Royal Oak Township, in south Ferndale -- and not making assumptions based on our own biases or broader trends and sentiments outside of our local communities. We must be honest about what we do not know, honest about how broader injustices hold-back our schools (e.g., the link between standardized tests and socioeconomic status, the push for school vouchers and charter schools, historic segregation and racial oppression in Metro Detroit, wages and school-funding not keeping pace with inflation and cost-of-living, etc.), and honest about this being a long fight that cannot happen solely within our District. Our Board must be willing to take public stances on advocacy -- as they did when they formally recognized racism as a public health crisis. And we need Ferndale Schools to be an example for equitable, engaging, grassroots democracy and advocacy, so we can empower our community members to bring the fight for equity to all corners of our broader society.

Describe the type of development that you see as most beneficial to Ferndale Schools.

I think one of the most beneficial developments that we can make to Ferndale Schools, right now, is improving our transparency, clearness, and efficiency of communication. Every school district has to grapple with the difficulty of clearly communicating information in a timely manner to a number of stakeholders -- administrative staff, educational staff, support staff, facilities staff, students, caregivers, and other engaged community members. In Ferndale, we have the added layers of our diverse communities with regards to race, culture, sexual identity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood. We have folks with varying access to communication and transportation resources, and varying availability for communication with school staff. So maintaining clear, efficient, and transparent communication with each and every community member in our District is a significant challenge -- but one that is crucial to our values of equity, empowerment, excellence, and a growth-promotive environment. I believe that the Board can play a significant role in improving communication. First, the Board can set the tone for the whole district in valuing transparency and accessibility, by doing everything it can to publicize its meetings and deliberations -- considering strategies such as live-streaming, online public comment and forums, offering dinner and childcare for folks who attend meetings, using social media to highlight Board activity, and developing more opportunities for meaningful student, caregiver, and community input and feedback during meetings. Similarly, the Board can commit policy and resources to allow for more folks to be involved in committees and decision making. Ferndale is no exception to the reality faced by most of our society -- that those of higher socioeconomic status have more resources, and thus more time, to take surveys, participate in focus groups and forums, and sit on committees. Therefore, it is not enough for us to make an additional outreach effort to our communities of lower socioeconomic status -- we must also commit resources to empower them to be involved. Paying staff members overtime for their involvement, paying community members cash-incentives (such as Visa gift cards) for their time, offering reimbursements for travel, and providing food and childcare for in-person participation. Enabling more of our marginalized community members to participate would advance our district goals of empowering our communities and promoting equity, as well as improve communication. The more we are all directly involved, the more we understand what is going on, and the less removed we are from the conversations happening within the district, every day. Finally, the Board can direct an audit of our current communications strategies, and see what improvements need to be made, and what support needs to be granted to our communications folks to make those improvements

happen. Developing better communication within our district would be highly beneficial, as it would serve to bolster all our other developments, and bring awareness to our excellence.

Describe Ferndale Schools in fifteen years. What do you see?

The Ferndale Schools communities have always prided ourselves on our diversity, our uniqueness, our inclusivity and our willingness to prioritize what is right, whether or not it is what other school districts are doing. Therefore, in fifteen years, I see Ferndale Schools leading public education in two critical domains -- democratic community engagement, and whole-child approaches to education that are grounded in quality social-emotional learning. As we continue our pride for our diversity, alongside our honesty about our strengths and challenges with equity and inclusivity, I envision a future in which all voices within our communities are not only heard by the School Board and administration, but one in which we all have a very active role in District decision making. Our current Board has made great strides in including student voices, and acknowledging which voices have been historically heard in our decision making, which have not, and trying to close the gap. I look forward to furthering this work in a way that builds grassroots, equitable engagement of all our communities -- geographic, caregiver, student, staff and administrative -- so that in fifteen years we have a school district of empowered individuals and communities who are knowledgeable about the inner workings of their schools, and use their diverse expertise to take ownership over their schools and help shape them to be the best they can be. A major part of Ferndale being the best it can be is our prioritization of social-emotional learning. While other districts are pushing more and more to "teach for the test," we are giving our students the skills that truly prepare one for success in life -- cooperation, effective communication, appreciation for diversity, confidence in oneself, and the ability to think critically and problem solve practically. Our communities are invested in Ferndale Schools because they know this is a core part of what makes our schools special. Therefore, as we continue to prioritize meaningful engagement of our community voices, we will be simultaneously prioritizing the advancement in the development of our whole-child approach to education. In fifteen years, I see Ferndale Schools being looked to as the archetype for what the new model of education will be, as our society collectively realizes the disservice "teaching to the test" has done to our students, and I see our Eagle Alumni serving as socially conscious leaders, wherever they may be.