



Leanne Hemphill Candura

MSAD#51 Board of Directors – 3 year term

My name is Leanne Candura, I live in North Yarmouth with my husband, Jeff, my two kids (a 7th grader and 5th grader at Greely Middle School), and our dog, Tippy. When my family chose to move here from Bethel, Maine four years ago, what attracted us was the open spaces, wooded trails, and highly respected school district. I grew up in Presque Isle, where I learned the value of hard work growing up as part of a potato farming family. I spent countless hours on the back of my uncle's harvester, and just as many stacking wood behind my house. As the first in my family to obtain a four-year degree (BA in Sociology from Stonehill College), and then a graduate degree (Master of Public Health from the University of Massachusetts), I know the importance of education and how it can open opportunities that may not have been available otherwise. My career has been spent in the public and non-profit sector working to evaluate public health programs and help governments and consumers better access and utilize public health data in their decision-making. For the past 16 years, I've worked at the Human Services Research Institute where I am now a Vice President. I've been in the fortunate position to work remotely for the past 10 years, and so I truly had a choice in where my family could work, play and thrive - North Yarmouth is that place.

1. What are your qualifications for the office that you seek?

- As a parent, I am deeply invested in our schools. I want every child in our community to be able to access a public education which provides them a space in which they can thrive. I started my career in public service, as an Americorp Vista working in a community to help them use data to assess needs and make funding decisions. Since then, I've spent my career working in and leading nonprofits to bring together stakeholders and evaluate data to help people make high quality decisions. I've secured and managed multi-million-dollar state and federal contracts and oversee dozens of staff members and subcontractors. I am highly respected by my peers because I work hard and lift others up to help them succeed. I've worked with complex systems and problems my entire career, ones that require bringing people together, tapping into the skills and strengths of team members, designing a strong plan, evaluating the data, and making firm decisions.

I have continually sought out meaningful ways to use my skills and experience to engage in the communities in which I live - from being a board member of the after school and summer camp program in Bethel, working with the Maine Community Foundation as a member of the Oxford County committee, to coaching my kids soccer teams over the years.

2. What motivated you to run for the office that you seek?

- When thinking about how I wanted to give back to my community, the school board felt like the natural fit for my skills and experience. I was already watching and participating in school board meetings, and no longer wanted to be on the outside looking in. I want to ensure that all kids can continue to be part of a safe, welcoming school, with teachers who feel supported and have opportunities for professional development, with administrators who understand how much our community values our school but want clear, transparent, responsible decision making. Our schools are one of our community's greatest assets and points of connection. I want to look for ways to bring our small community together and be proud of the work – by students, teachers, and administrators – in our schools. I want a town that can come together and celebrate not only our high performing schools, but how they provide a place for shared community pride, even for residents who don't have kids in the school district. I feel very fortunate for the experience my own kids have had in this district and want to ensure that all students can have access to a similar experience. Now that my kids are a bit older, and post-pandemic life requires less work travel, I felt strongly that it was my turn to step up and give back to my community by running for school board. This is a great opportunity to use my skills as a listener and strategic problem solver, my data-driven approach to decision making, and experience as a leader, to help our district.

3. Do you have sufficient time/energy to devote to this position?

- Now that my kids are older and more independent (and my soccer coaching skills maxed out at 3rd grade) I feel that I have the time to do this job well. I take this commitment very seriously and would not have stepped forward unless I did have sufficient time and energy to devote to this position. As part of my decision-making process, I made sure I met with current and past board members to understand what the time commitment would be before I decided to run for this position.

4. With one or two meetings a month, all boards are limited in what they can accomplish, how should the board decide what is most important?

- The role of the school board is not the day-to-day management of the school district, but it is to make sure that the day-to-day operations are well managed. That means making sure the administration knows and understands the goals of their stakeholders and the strategic direction of the district and has the authority and means to execute on them.

Deciding what is most important to address when there are so many priorities – some of which may be conflicting – is going to be a challenge. My first priority would be to work to address overcrowding in the district and help efficiently and effectively guide the building of a new school. We are a high-performing district shared by two highly desirable communities. But MSAD#51 must be good partners with our host communities. A new school will not come without sacrifice for our neighbors and we should be working to listen and address their concerns, operate as efficiently and effectively as possible, and advocate for the importance of investing in our schools.

There are, of course, many more priorities: delivering on the promise of a safe, inclusive, and equitable school environment; providing our teachers with the professional development they need to teach in a rapidly changing world; keeping our staff, teachers, and students healthy through this and any future pandemic; ensuring that our budget is as lean as possible; addressing concerns about bullying and school safety; and making sure we continue to deliver high quality education to all student regardless of their needs.

The success I have had in my career has relied on a large team of people coming together for shared success. The success of large organizations is due to the skills and talents of many, not just those in leadership.

5. Think of an issue facing North Yarmouth that you care about. Do you have a positive solution that you want to bring forth?

- North Yarmouth is an attractive community, especially to families. The reasons we chose North Yarmouth – open spaces, wooded trails, easy access to Portland, a welcoming community, and strong schools – continue to drive people to this area. This is going to continue to put pressure on our already overcrowded schools. Anyone who drives through our school campus can see the portable classrooms taking away from the open spaces and playgrounds, straining our resources, and fracturing our school community. It also has put an incredible amount of stress on our shared spaces for our youngest learners. I fully recognize that the expense of a new school puts an additional stress on our tax base, which is primarily residential. That means a strain on all household budgets, but especially those on a fixed income. We must make sure that we are keeping the cost of the school as low as possible, while also talking about and advocating for the value of the school to the communities. As Superintendent Porter said when he presented a draft of the coming year’s budget: our schools are not just something to pay for, they are something to invest in. As a board, we must make sure we are delivering on that value for our residents. Our schools should be a point of pride not just for those with students that attend, but for the whole community. I am excited that the newly proposed school is in North Yarmouth, and I want to make sure that our district can successfully move forward with this new school in our community.