

# **East Brunswick Education Association**

Presents

## **MEET THE East Brunswick Board of Education CANDIDATES NIGHT**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2021**

**7:00-8:30 PM**

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Moderated by:

**MARYBETH BEICHERT**

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East Brunswick Community Arts Center  
721 Cranbury Road  
East Brunswick, New Jersey



## ***Welcome***

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### **CONDUCTED BY**

Dr. Dana Zimbicki, EBEA President

### **MODERATED BY**

Marybeth Biechert, NJEA Associate  
Director of Government Relations

## ***Schedule***

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**7:00 PM** — Introductions of Candidates

**7:15 PM** — Question & Answer Session

**8:00 PM** — Closing Remarks

## ***Live Broadcasting***

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<https://www.facebook.com/EastBrunswickTV>



## ***The Candidates***

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(listed in alphabetical order)

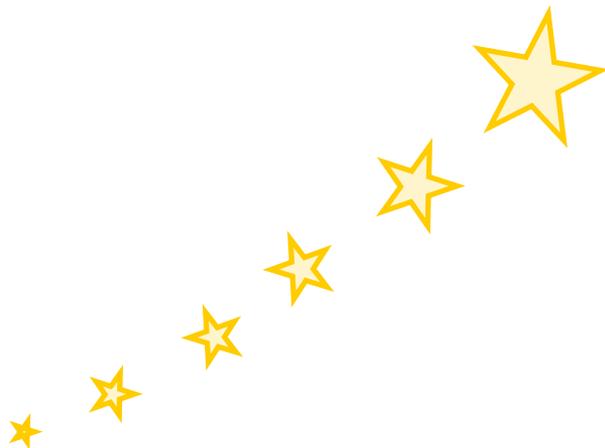
Vicki Becker

Denise Medford

Barbara Reiss

Jeffrey Winston

\*candidates were asked to supply EBEA with a  
“Statement of Candidacy” to be published in  
this publication.





## ***Vicki Becker***

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I am a 35-year resident of East Brunswick and have served on the Board of Education for 21 years, currently as President of the Board. I have two children, both of whom have gone through the East Brunswick school district. In my “day job” I am Director of Administrative Services for a development company.

I never could have imagined leading our Board through a pandemic. What an experience this has been! We have faced unprecedented health, safety, and economic challenges. Along with the entire Board, our superintendent, administration and staff, I have worked during the pandemic to ensure that we were meeting the needs of students and staff, all the while balancing everything with Federal and State guidelines and mandates.

As we approached the summer of 2020 and realized that opening school in September would provide monumental challenges, I suggested to Dr Valeski that we schedule a board meeting every week during the summer to not only keep the Board informed of the policies and processes that were changing daily – but to keep our parents, residents, staff, and administrators informed. This proved to be an invaluable communication tool. It also provided residents the opportunity to speak at the Good of the Cause every week.

I am so grateful that the Board had the partnership of the EBPA and EBPSA during this time. In other school districts, teachers and administrators did not feel part of the process but that was not the case in East Brunswick. It is because of the incredible dedication and efforts of our staff and administrators that our students were able to be provided with an optimal learning experience. No remote session could ever replace the experience of being physically in a classroom, but our staff met the challenges head-on and used creativity and technology to get the job done. And our parents did a fantastic job partnering with our staff to provide the extra support their children needed.

And our work is far from done! We have enormous challenges in front of us as we emerge from this pandemic that will need experienced people such as myself to provide the necessary guidance and make crucial decisions. We need to be able to provide not only the academic support our students will need this year as they return to school in person, but more important – the social and emotional support they will need. I am so pleased with the efforts our district has taken to ensure this support will be available to every student and proud to be a member of a Board that has approved the necessary tools for this to happen.

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## **Vicki Becker** *(continued from previous page)*

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Working alongside the staff at Lawrence Brook school as the PTA President there inspired me to become more involved with the district and led to my decision to run for the board. I have served on every board committee and have been Chairperson of most of them. I served on the board when we facilitated full-day kindergarten, made the decision to televise board meetings so there would be more transparency with the public, built and/or reconstructed 5 schools, and partnered with Middlesex County Community College to further enhance the course offerings for our high school students. I have always been a strong advocate for the Arts and Athletics and have supported our many course offerings and teams for these two crucial areas of our district. My leadership abilities are demonstrated by my being voted in as President of the Board by my peers these last three years and as Vice President for years before that.

With experience comes the ability to help oversee the district, especially in terms of the annual budget. There is an over-reliance of funding public education through property taxes in this state and the board must always keep in mind that this is the taxpayer's money they are entrusted with. Fiscal responsibility is not just a once-a-year task when we approve the budget, but a pledge every day to scrutinize and question every dollar that we spend.

This school district isn't easy. Achieving excellence is one thing – maintaining it and consistently raising the bar requires constant work and diligence. We are preparing our children for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education and to live in a global economy and community which has been dramatically changed because of the pandemic. We need to ensure they have the emotional, social, and academic tools they will need. We need to constantly refine and enhance our curriculum with an eye towards the role technology plays in the classroom. We need to continue to provide quality programs in the Arts and Athletics so that all students have an opportunity to explore their interests and engage their passions. And we need to provide the necessary professional development for our staff and administrators for them to have the means they need to inspire and educate our children.

Plain and simple – to be a board member, you have to love doing this. You must want to volunteer with 8 other residents as a consensus seeking group and leave your personal agendas home and do what's "best for the kids". This phrase has become a cliché, but as with most clichés, there is an underlying truth. I continue to love to do this and to do what's best for the kids and I would consider myself privileged to continue to serve in this capacity.



## ***Denise Medford***

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### **OBJECTIVE**

Focus on the student's development first.

Ensure curriculum is Blue Ribbon standard.

Promote professional development for staff and teachers.

Create a positive space for community dialogue.

LISTEN to learn.

### **SKILLS**

Excellent communication and collaboration skills.

Ability to bridge gaps with ease and foster connections while pursuing unified interests.

Adept at visualizing what's needed and prompting practical solutions.

Strong sense of community with a sincere desire to serve and give back, as well as mobilizing others to pitch in!

### **EXPERIENCE**

#### **FINANCIAL ADVISORY AND RISK MANAGEMENT WHOLESALER**

Regional Vice President in charge of consulting and educating Financial Advisors, CPA's and Certified Planners the proper placement of investments solutions within a portfolio.

Conducted NJ State Continuing Education and Insurance workshops for financial professionals.

Lead client appreciation seminars, Legacy & Estate Planning conferences. A sought-after keynote speaker for Women and Investing workshops and instituted a highly regarded Million Dollar Round Table Idea Exchange for financial professionals.

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## ***Denise Medford*** (continued from previous page)

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The past 8 years, she has been the owner/operator of a growing fitness franchise, which promotes healthy, sustainable lifestyle changes through exercise, nutritional counseling and success coaching. She utilizes her vast background to creatively and consistently encourage, inspire and support her clients to reach, as well as maintain, their health and wellness goals.

### **VOLUNTEERISM AND LEADERSHIP**

Denise tirelessly raises funds and awareness for numerous charities, schools and local causes. She was awarded Citizen of the Year in 2019 by The Arc of Ocean Chapter for her philanthropy.

She has donated the use of her fitness center for promoting Shop Small Business Expos, organizing coat drives for NJ Cares, food drives for Community and Fulfill Food Banks, donation drives for Stockings for Soldiers, fundraising for Veterans Ruck 22 and Rebuilding Warriors, as well as local school teams and clubs. She has hosted fundraisers for Susan G. Komen Foundation and American Brain Tumor Association in addition to raising funds for local families burdened by disaster, illness or personal tragedy.



## ***Barbara Reiss***

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Thank you for offering me this opportunity to reach out to the EBEA membership. My name is Barbara Reiss. I have lived in East Brunswick for nineteen years with my husband Larry and our two children, who proudly attend East Brunswick schools and are now both students at EBHS.

I am honored by the prospect of continuing to serve as a member of the Board of Education. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brooklyn College where I graduated with honors from the Scholars Program. I also have a Master's degree in Education from New York University. I have worked as a public and religious school teacher as well as a newspaper reporter. I come from a long line of public school teachers. My mom was a high school Spanish teacher in Brooklyn for 27 years. My Grandma worked as an elementary school teacher in Brooklyn as well.

During these unprecedented times, our East Brunswick teachers went above and beyond in their efforts to deliver top notch instruction to our district's children every day.

Sometimes the only "normal" thing about a day for our kids was school. Our dedicated teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, counselors, and staff worked alongside our administrators, to make sure our children had the best possible educational experience during a worldwide pandemic. As both a board member and parent, I am forever grateful.

As a school board member, I strive to be balanced and open minded when considering proposals. I value research and look to hear from a variety of voices that represent all sides of a situation. I work diligently and cooperatively with my fellow board members to build upon past successes and find new learning opportunities.

As the recent chair of the Student Services committee, I strongly supported the efforts of our Superintendent and Student Services department to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of our students and teachers during this extremely stressful time. Whether it is through student and teacher support groups, presentations to parents about student wellness and mental health, or marking period credit recovery programs, our counseling department and teachers are providing the expert guidance and kindness that our students need so

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## **Barbara Reiss** *(continued from previous page)*

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much right now. I will continue to support our district's ongoing efforts to provide all our students and teachers with the tools they need to make a successful full day return to school.

During the pandemic, our teachers also faced the additional challenge of providing instruction for students online as they taught other students in person. Our teachers and technology department rose to the challenge. They utilized online tools in many innovative ways that engaged the children in creative projects and meaningful group collaboration.

As a former chair and current member of the school board's technology committee, I am proud to be a part of Dr. Valeski's and the board's ongoing efforts to support our teachers with a strong technology infrastructure. Our skilled technology department made it possible for our students and teachers to have access to the laptops, software and technical support they needed to continue their learning during a global pandemic.

I have been a longtime supporter of helping our students take the next step in technology to become authors of the programs of the future. During my time as the Frost PTA President, I worked together with the principal, PTA Liaison teacher and TAG teacher to initiate an after school enrichment class that introduced students of all abilities to Scratch, a kid-focused coding language using computers as well as Lego motorized toys. Students immediately saw how their coding skills made it possible for them to create their own computer games and activities and have fun while doing it.

Once on the board, as chair of the school board technology committee, I worked with my fellow board members and the administration to expand our coding offerings to our elementary classrooms and after school programs. Our teachers do an excellent job incorporating technology into our children's day-to-day assignments. Our students are learning how to use various programs and present their findings using top-notch computers and software. Our district continues to add age-appropriate coding activities and projects that will help prepare our children for the jobs of the 21st century.

My family and I strongly believe in the power of volunteerism to make positive change in our community. When we moved here, I co-founded

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**Barbara Reiss** *(continued from previous page)*

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and ran the EB Area chapter of the MOMS (Moms Offering Moms Support) Club which recently celebrated its' 15th anniversary. My husband has coached girls' softball, boys' baseball and helped establish the EB NFL Flag Football program in town.

Once my kids entered Frost, I became an active member of the PTA. I volunteered for various fundraising, multicultural and educational committees, serving as president until my appointment to the school board. I have also proudly served as a member of the EB Human Relations Council, the Community Programs Advisory Committee, and as a producer and reporter for EBTv.

I was fortunate that both my parents believed that education would be their kids' ticket to a successful life. My father emigrated from Argentina in the 1950's and learned to speak English at night school. He worked long hours in an electrical supply warehouse for many years. Unfortunately, earlier this year, my father passed away from COVID. One of his proudest moments was when he was recognized for being a 55-year-member of the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers). He often worked overtime so that we would have enough money for extracurricular activities. My mom also worked a second job as a community college teacher. They valued hard work and education. It is that strong belief that continues to motivate me to work towards helping to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive a high-quality public school education in East Brunswick.

I look forward to the opportunity to help our district in its' constant effort to be the best it can be. I will work with my fellow board members to continue to update our curricula and technology so that you, our teachers and staff, have the best resources available. I believe in maintaining strong lines of communication between the board, the administrators, the teachers and parents of our district.

I am also a strong supporter of staff development. I will continue to work with the board to partner with our teachers and staff in our ongoing work to provide our students with the best opportunities in their academic studies, the arts and athletics.

I hope to continue to be a part of the East Brunswick educational system that provides our children the access to the tools they need to live successful and rewarding professional lives.



## ***Jeffrey Winston***

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I am seeking a second term for the East Brunswick Board of Education. Three years ago I decided to run for a BOE position with a specific platform and desire to impact the district in a positive way and offer a fresh perspective. That has not changed and now, with more familiarity of the commitment, it is clear that those reasons resonate more today than ever.

It would be a gross understatement that much change has been thrust upon the district in the last two years. Navigating safety in light of the Covid-19 virus has put leadership to the test and the responsibilities placed upon the Board have never been greater. The community has been vocal in their concerns and desires and it has been my position to remain visible and approachable and forthcoming. I have four children in the district along with many friends who are parents of students; many staff members are personally known to me. I believe each of these voices are important and they deserve the ability to communicate directly with those whom they have entrusted to act responsibly with accountability. I feel I have done that through email response, conversation, a presence on social media and a solid pragmatic approach in debating and discussing issues that impact the district. While I can not speak for my fellow members, I am confident that I have and will continue to give back to all stakeholders some things that they should be able to expect from an elected leader: accountability, accessibility, honesty and transparency.

During my first term with the BoE I have served on several committees. I am vocal and often demand clarity of issues - it is important to understand the logic behind decisions and to hold decision-makers accountable. My personality is one where I speak truth to power while urging my peers to continue to raise the bar for the administration - so that it consistently operates with the best practices and highest capabilities in mind.

I believe action and, at times inaction, transparency and accountability are the cornerstones to a successful district. I have been a strong advocate of proactive mitigation of what I speculate will be opportunities in addressing mental health of both students and staff as

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## **Jeffrey Winston** *(continued from previous page)*

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a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is my strong belief that our guidance department will need to re-invent their roles in assuring the mental well being of our students as they navigate our new reality.

Early in my tenure, long before the pandemic, I successfully proposed a communication protocol to regularly and consistently keep parents aware of changes and events occurring within the district. The formation of a response team to disseminate facts before social media has a chance to spread misinformation was vital - and has been successfully used in several situations since its introduction.

I have advocated for pragmatic, responsible use of community tax dollars to be used in the most effective and productive way. There are few with whom I serve that are willing to offer the level of scrutiny on key issues and without personal emotions or feelings and to work to a resolution that is best, makes sense and utilizes all available resources. Praise is a great thing, but I believe that constructive criticism does not always have to be either preceded or followed with accolades. We are a strong district and only made stronger when we expect the best from our Administration without reservations of hurting one's feelings.

Personally, I have lived in East Brunswick for nearly my entire 59 years. I attended Warnsdorfer, Churchill and the High School, graduating in 1980. My father, Robert Winston, was among the original staff to open East Brunswick High School where he taught history and was the Advisor to the first year book committee. I like to say that because of him, we have and are the EBHS Bears. My Mother was a career educator, teaching Health to students in the Middletown school district for nearly 30 years. I owe my love of the educational process to them both.

My wife Dana is EBHS graduate. She, along with our 5 children and I proudly reside in East Brunswick. Our oldest attends the University of Arizona and the rest will soon follow into higher education over the next few years.

It is my strong belief that East Brunswick has a great school system but must never lose sight that we can be even greater with the proper

*(Continued on page 13)*



**Jeffrey Winston** *(continued from previous page)*

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people in place to insist on performance at a higher level. We owe it to our Students, Staff and all stakeholders to excel in bettering the district.

I have great admiration for the Administration and the staff who have passionately reinvented themselves in these critical last 18 months. I take special notice of the teachers who, overnight, became videographers, sound engineers, lighting experts, directors, producers and the talent executing a virtual learning plan and kept the education moving forward without missing a beat. I also admire our students and community for their resiliency, patience, and commitment to seeing us through these challenging times.

Thank you and I hope I am deserving of your support and given the opportunity to continue the work that I have begun.



***Televised on EBTV***

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Meet The East Brunswick Board of Education  
Candidates Night will run on EBTV as follows:

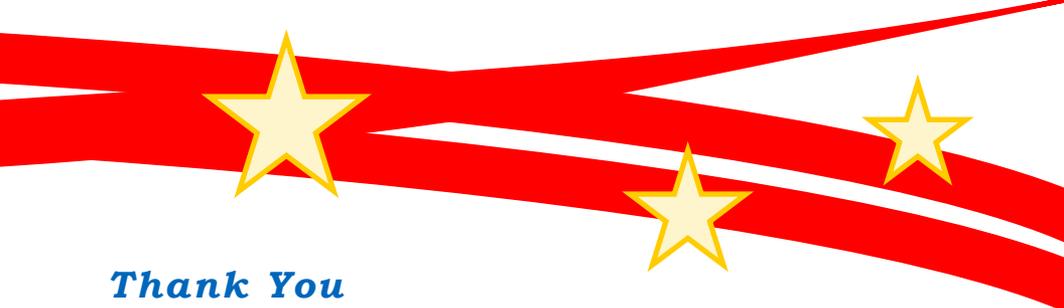
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<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>
<b>10:00 am</b>	<b>10:00 am</b>
<b>8:00 pm</b>	<b>8:00 pm</b>
October 16	October 20
October 23	October 27
October 30	

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As well as at EBTV Video On Demand  
under Politics Programing  
([www.ebtv.org/programs](http://www.ebtv.org/programs))





## ***Thank You***

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### **MODERATOR**

Marybeth Beichert, NJEA Associate Director of Government Relations

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Adam Neary, Executive Producer/Vice President ,  
Playhouse 22

### **BROADCASTING**

David Ambrosy, Manager, EBTV

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**EAST BRUNSWICK  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**



*Heart, Strength & Unity*



## ***A Message from EBEA***

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It is our pleasure to be able to supply the East Brunswick community with our “Meet The Candidates” Night as part of one of our many PRIDE events.

Additional EBEA PRIDE events you can see us at annually:

- \* ***EB Community Day***— a day where East Brunswick business share what they do
- \* ***Mall-O-Ween***—trick-or-treating at the Brunswick Square Mall
- \* ***EB Holiday of Lights***— celebrating the start of the holidays with the East Brunswick community
- \* ***EBPS Staff Recognition Ceremony***— the EB BOE recognizes the Teacher of the Year & Support Staff of the Year from each building
- \* ***State of the District Address***— Superintendent Dr. Valeski shares this year’s significant accomplishments with the EB community

**Come join us at these free, fun and informational events!**

**<http://tiny.cc/EBEA-PRIDE>**

