Responses to Questions from the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd by Candidates Appearing on Primary Election Ballots for Lower Merion School District Board of Directors
May 2025

NOTE: Responses have not been edited. If a response ends with "[]" that means the submission had a word count over 350 words, and so it was truncated with words above 350 being cut.

<u>Question 1</u>: Qualifications: What experience or perspective do you bring that uniquely qualifies you to serve on the school board?

Rebecca Brodsky
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

My daughter attends one of the six elementary schools in the district which gives me insight to see if the curriculum is successful or needs to be adjusted. I have finished serving my second year as a CO-VP on the Penn Valley Elementary HSA Board. I will be serving my third and final year as Co-VP in the upcoming school year. Through this role, I have gained firsthand experiences in the time, coordination, and dedication it takes to plan and execute school events. I worked closely with parents and school staff members to ensure we had the necessary volunteers, supplies, and completed paperwork for each event. During my first year as Co-VP, I helped implement HSA sponsored before and after school clubs to the students at PVE. My co-chair and I, We coordinated the communication between the vendors and the contract and Project Manager for the District Administration. In addition, we made sure all the background check paperworks and insurance information were submitted correctly. We worked along with the School's office to confirm the dates and times of the school facilities would be available for club use. We had a successful first year of clubs. Our second year, the district administration wanted the HSA to utilize Right at School for before and afterschool Clubs since they already provide before and after school care. I am a small business

owner in the township and I help manage my family's real estate investments so I understand about operating within a budget.

Omer Dekel
Appearing on the Republican ballot

With 20 years of experience as a tech leader in software development, innovation, Data and AI, I've developed data-driven solutions to problems, a skill central to effective school board governance. As Director of AI Engineering at a SaaS company, I lead teams, utilize resources and budgets and measure success. I'll apply my expertise managing LMSD's $340 million budget. I immigrated from Israel to the United States 17 years ago and served in the IDF Intelligence Corps.I earned my master's in computer science and I have three children at Welsh Valley Middle School. I'm deeply invested in our district. Increasingly involved in LMSD issues . I see its strengths and areas for improvement. My blend of technical expertise, leadership, and community commitment uniquely equips me to enhance transparency, accountability, and educational outcomes.

Juanita James Kerber
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

As a Clinical Imaging Analyst, I manage applications, train new staff, and serve on a risk management team. I work closely with clinicians and leadership to improve patient care. These experiences have sharpened my skills in collaboration, listening, and root-cause problem solving—skills I would bring to the school board to support our students and community.

Richard Lester
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

A school board should include members with different and complementary sets of skills. I like to say, "you don't want 9 Rich Lester's on your school

board, but one or two people with my skills are important". The experience and skills I bring include:

- Starting a business, Veterinary Practice Partners, that grew from business plan to $150 million in revenue with 1200 staff in a 10-year period. As the Founder and CEO I have led, managed and hired a team that grew a successful organization that continues to thrive after my retirement from leadership.
- I have established strategic plans, set annual goals that were measured and reported on regularly.
- I have been a board member at both for-profit and non-profit organizations, having seen how a high functioning board helps support organizational success and a less well-functioning board impairs the leadership team from achieving their goals.

I moved to Philadelphia for my first CEO job in 2006 and as I prepared for my first board meeting, the investors suggested a board dinner the night before. With young kids at home, I was not excited about a dinner with people I did not know well. Before the next board meeting, we had another board dinner and I quickly realized that developing personal relationships with the board members was essential. It is easier to disagree and debate tough issues with people that you have a personal rapport with.

Getting to know the existing board members personally would be a high priority if I were fortunate enough to be elected. Collaboration is enhanced through understanding each individual as a whole person.

In addition to business and board leadership, I have been an active member of the LM community since arriving here in 2006, including:

- Leading the Main Line Reform Temple Speaker Series Committee that has brough important speakers to the community including Dana Bash, Howie Roseman, Adam Grant and more.
- Cub scout leader for 7 years
- Coached my daughters Main Line Girls Basketball League team for 4 years
- Regularly volunteer for the Jewish Relief Agency
- My wife, Rachel, was H.S.A president at Gladwyne and []

Talia Nissim
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

As a stay-at-home mom of three boys in Lower Merion School District (LMSD) schools, I bring a parent's perspective to every conversation about education. I experience firsthand what's working and where we can do better—academically, socially, and emotionally—for all of our children.

Over the years, I've stayed deeply involved in our schools. I serve as a member-at-large for the Interschool Council (ISC), where I hear from parents across the district about their hopes and concerns. I'm also part of my school's cultural proficiency team, where we focus on building inclusive environments that support every student. These roles have given me a clear view into how our district operates and the ways we can strengthen it.

Outside of school, I've worked with both the Jewish Community Relations Council and the NAACP on outreach efforts that connect and uplift our diverse community. That work has helped me understand the importance of equity, empathy, and communication—values I carry into every space I'm part of.

I believe in the power of strong public schools to shape not just students, but communities. I'm committed to academic excellence, to creating space for innovation in our curriculum, and to supporting student well-being at every level. I believe we can—and must—do better for all kids, and that starts with listening to families and building real partnerships between home and school.

If elected, I'll bring fresh ideas, a collaborative spirit, and a deep commitment to transparency and trust. I want to help restore LMSD's reputation for excellence, not just through test scores, but through a culture where every student feels seen, challenged, and supported.

My experience as an engaged parent, a district volunteer, and a community connector has prepared me to serve. Most importantly, I'm ready to listen, learn, and lead—alongside you.

Deena Pack
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

As a Regional Director of Nursing and Home Health Administrator, I have a unique skillset to bring to the LMSD Board. I am a nurse leader who primarily cares for a pediatric population. I have both the empathy as well as the extensive knowledge of pediatric growth and development to support all students. I am also a successful businesswoman who has grown my division from a start up to 4 branches employing hundreds of employees across the southeast region of PA. Through my focus on quality care and fiscal responsibility, I manage the needs of my patients, nursing staff, and business to ensure we are all mutually successful. I am the current Chapter Chair of the Orthodox Jewish Nurses Association, a committee member on the Mourner's Support Committee at my synagogue, and an active advocate for local charities, including the Philadelphia Police Foundation. But at my core, I am a nurse. I bring a deep care for others to everything I do.

Jennifer Louise Rivera
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

As a mother, wife, professional, and active community member, I've learned how to balance the needs of many, approaching each situation with empathy, a willingness to listen, and a focus on finding solutions. That same mindset is what shapes my work and my commitment to community service, where I prioritize both financial accountability and meaningful engagement. Together, these experiences will help me make thoughtful, responsible decisions that serve both students and taxpayers.

At the heart of my decision to run for school board is a deep, unwavering commitment to every child in this district, no exceptions. This community is woven into the fabric of who I am: my mother graduated from this district, my father has served it for decades, I mentor middle and high school youth in the district, and my husband and I are raising our children in this beautiful district. Our daughter Bella is thriving in kindergarten at Cynwyd Elementary, and soon, our youngest, Joshua, will join her. This is home, and it's a community that has given my family so much. This is why it's so important to me that we

have the best in class school district and that every child is able to thrive at LMSD.

My professional experience has equipped me with the necessary skills to put my values into action. With over 20 years of experience , I excel in supporting financial oversight and strategic planning. I have supported Finance, Audit, and Investment Committees, managing a $100M+ budget to ensure efficiency. I also organized audits with Grant Thornton, ensuring compliance, transparency, and fostering meaningful discussions for informed decision-making. This experience has equipped me to navigate policies and build consensus, which I can apply as school board director to keep our schools on a path of excellence.

Jacob Rudolph
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

I am about to graduate from Lower Merion School District, after having spent 13 years in it, and I have lived both the district's strengths and weaknesses as they've happened. As a twice-exceptional student—meaning I am identified as gifted yet also living with ADHD—I know firsthand how policies on paper can fail children in practice. My family spent nearly two years fighting for a correct evaluation and services the law had already guaranteed. Yet the school district continued to fight us. That lived experience, combined with my youthful energy, urgency, and optimism, gives me a perspective no incumbent can match and a laser focus on fixing the systems that failed so many families like mine.

Kerry Sautner
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

A lifelong advocate for civic engagement and public education, I grew up in Ardmore and returned to Lower Merion over 15 years ago. I've been an active community member my entire life, beginning with volunteer work as a child. As an adult, I volunteered with my son's Scouts troop in Narberth, participating in everything from first aid training to building bat boxes, and

served on the Narberth Civic Association, helping with traditions like the Dickens Festival.

I bring a district-wide perspective, having lived in Ardmore, Narberth, and Gladwyne. I'm a Bala Cynwyd Middle School alum, a current LMSD parent, and now a Harriton alum parent. I'm deeply rooted in the neighborhoods that make Lower Merion unique and value my lifelong connection to this community.

I serve as President and CEO of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, where I lead nationally recognized efforts in justice education, civic engagement, and workforce development. Under my leadership, we've expanded reentry programs, increased accessibility, and launched initiatives like the LEAD Fellowship and the Preservation Trades Center, which creates pathways to employment for returning citizens.

I served as Chief Learning Officer at the National Constitution Center, where I oversaw national education and visitor experience and launched "Policing in a More Perfect Union," a civic dialogue program for police recruits. My doctoral research explored how storytelling can shape public understanding of justice and community.

I've serve as President of the Lower Merion Board of School Directors for two years, after serving as Vice President, and have been a board member for nearly four years. I champion academic excellence, inclusion, and strong partnerships between families, staff, and leadership. As a parent of a child with special needs, I'm a passionate advocate for special education and believe in maintaining high expectations for all children, grounded in student-centered supports.

I hold a doctorate in Educational Leadership and an M.S. in Elementary Education from Drexel University, and a B.S. in Biology and Marine Science from Rutgers. I've taught at Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania and serve on the ABA's Public Education Advisory Commission and The Forum of Executive Women.

Anna Shurak
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

I bring over 20 years of experience in public education-as a teacher, principal, Chief Schools Officer, and nonprofit executive. I've worked across the educational spectrum, from classroom instruction to leading systems-wide strategy and overseeing budgets. I hold master's degrees in both Educational Leadership and Elementary Education, and currently serve as Co-Chair of the LMSD Policy Committee.

For the past three and a half years, I have served on the Lower Merion School Board, collaborating with colleagues and the community to deliver meaningful results. During my term, we implemented full-day kindergarten, shifted school start times to better support adolescent health, preserved Oakwell, and protected our district's equity policy-all while navigating four superintendent transitions.

As a parent of two daughters at Bala Cynwyd Middle School and a 3-year-old who will begin kindergarten at Cynwyd Elementary in two years, I bring both professional insight and personal investment in our district's future. I understand the real-life needs of LMSD families and am committed to ensuring our schools remain strong, inclusive, and future-ready.

Question 2: Issues: What do you see as the two most pressing issues facing LMSD over the next 3–5 years?

Rebecca Brodsky
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

Currently, there are many pressing issues facing LMSD, but for the next 3-5 years, I would say Fighting Antisemtism (Hate Speech in School) and the Balancing of the School Budget which the school's expenditures have increased by almost 15 million dollars. There is also the issue of the achievement gap which has not reduce but almost increased in the last several years due to Covid.

Omer Dekel
Appearing on the Republican ballot

The two major issues LMSD will face over the next 3–5 years are fiscal transparency, and measurable student performance. First, while LMSD excels in many areas, we can improve how we communicate and utilize our $340 million budget. Taxpayers deserve clear, accessible data on spending efficiency. I'll advocate for quarterly audits to ensure accountability and maximize value.

Second, use data and measurable outcomes to ascertain if educational programs are having success by adopting Objective Key Results (OKRs), we can track whether initiatives improve student success, allowing us to refine or redirect resources effectively. This data-driven focus ensures every dollar benefits students, addressing concerns about waste while enhancing academic excellence—priorities I believe resonate with our community's values.

Juanita James Kerber
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

1. Supporting the diverse needs of all students.
2. Maintaining educational excellence amid: budget deficits, federal funding cuts, and rapid changes like AI.

Richard Lester
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

First, we need to support our new Superintendent and ensure he is successful and second, we need to create a culture that ensure "good governance".

With the revolving door of Superintendents, we have lacked consistent leadership that has impacted all aspects of our schools. Supporting Dr. Ranelli's success is critical and it is essential to establish clear expectations on how we want to run LMSD.

Good Governance is not an abstract concept but it is hard to implement. It involves:

- Establishing a strategic plan with clear and measurable long-term goals that includes community buy-in
- Having annual goals that are driven by the Superintendent and their cabinet, while being reviewed and agreed upon by the board. These goals need to be measured and community updates should be provided at least quarterly.

This sounds simple but having the discipline to execute on this is not easy and has not been happening.

I will use hate and antisemitism as an example. In November, a Welsh Valley student talked about an incident on the playground during public comment at a board meeting. After the meeting I talked to one of the Acting Assistant Superintendents about what the data said about the number of antisemitic and racist incidents that had been occurring over time. I was informed we didn't track the information. The school board president confirmed in an email exchange after the meeting that there was not good data on a key community issue.

My view is that this is a governance and leadership issue. If the school principals all knew that hate was a priority and the board was reporting progress on this issue each quarter to the community, the data would become more important to track. Each principal has many competing priorities to address at their individual schools. If the board clearly articulates priorities and measures success – then those items receive attention. When no priorities are set by the Superintendent and the Board – then each principal prioritizes based on their own agendas.

Talia Nissim
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

Two of the most important issues we face in LMSD right now are curriculum quality and community engagement. As a parent with three boys in our

schools, I've seen the strengths in our district—but I've also seen where we need to do better.

First, our curriculum needs to be both rigorous and relevant. We owe it to our students to challenge them, but also to make sure what they're learning prepares them for the world they'll step into after graduation. That means ensuring materials are age-appropriate, educationally strong, and reflect real-world skills. I believe in thoughtful curriculum review that includes input from educators, families, and students, so we're not just keeping up—we're leading.

Second, we have to rebuild trust between the district and the families it serves. Parents want to be involved. We want to be heard and to feel like our perspectives matter. Unfortunately, too many feel left out of the conversation. Community engagement shouldn't be an afterthought—it should be part of every decision the board makes. We need to create more opportunities for open dialogue, respectful debate, and shared problem-solving.

Through my work on the Interschool Council and with organizations like the Jewish Community Relations Council and the NAACP, I've had the opportunity to listen closely to many different voices across our community. I've seen the disconnects—and I've also seen how powerful it can be when families and schools work together.

I'm running for school board because I believe we can do better. We can have a district where the curriculum truly prepares our kids for the future and where parents are valued as partners. I'll bring a parent's perspective, a collaborative mindset, and a strong commitment to transparency.

Let's make LMSD a place where every child feels supported, every parent feels heard, and every decision is made with our community in mind.

Deena Pack
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

The two most pressing issues from my perspective are addressing antisemitism in our schools. Allowing any kind of hate in our schools should be totally forbidden. Our Jewish students need to feel safe in school-and two of my own children have faced significant antisemitic attacks at LMSD. We must immediately implement clear policies surrounding ANY acts of hate, including antisemitism, and create a comprehensive tracking system for incidents. We also need to ensure there are swift and appropriate consequences in place. All of these interventions should be evaluated quarterly to ensure success and safety for all students.

The second most pressing issue is special education. LMSD currently spends $40,000 per student but underserves our special education and gifted population, often forcing them into litigation instead of receiving support. I will push for less litigation, more special instruction teachers, and a taskforce on improving special education access. Students requiring special education make up almost 15% of an average student population and that number is growing. LMSD must support this community further.

Jennifer Louise Rivera
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

To be honest it is hard to narrow my response down to two most pressing issues, but I would say: (1) Inconsistent student support (2) Leadership retention and ensuring a successful transition of our new superintendent

As a district we need to better understand and address the needs of every student. That means using existing data, alongside feedback from families and educators, to identify where students are struggling and where support systems need to improve. Whether it's strengthening IEPs, addressing academic disparities, bullying/hate or responding to community concerns, these are just some of the pressing issues I hear in my conversations while campaigning that I am committed to addressing as School Board Director.

When it comes to supporting the success of all students in their academic journey, it's essential to address their needs, resources, and support. This includes ensuring that IEPs are not only compliant but also customized, actionable, and responsive to each child's unique needs. I also want to acknowledge that navigating the educational system can be challenging for families, and Lower Merion is no exception. Equipping families with expert advice, actionable tips, tools, insights, and strategies for their child is extremely important. This includes helping them advocate effectively for their child's emotional needs, understand school policies and support systems, build strong partnerships with teachers and staff, and tap into available community resources.

Our school environments must be safe, inclusive, and emotionally supportive. As a district we must not only address safety but get to the root causes by tracking and analyzing data, we can better understand where improvements are needed. It is important that families feel supported and informed, and this will help ensure their children feel safe, seen, and supported in school settings.

This past month, we had the opportunity to welcome Dr. Ranelli as the new Superintendent of Lower Merion School District, and I look forward to building a strong relationship and supporting his transition to ensure long-term leadership stability. I look forward to the opportunity to work hand in hand with him and the rest of the board on developing a new strategic plan. To []

Jacob Rudolph
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

Special-Education Access and Culture: A bad evaluation process, and a legal team that prefers litigation over mediation, deprive too many students of a Free and Appropriate Public Education

Rising Antisemitism and Other Hate-Based Incidents. Incidents are increasing while communication and resolution are few and far between; this erodes community trust in the board.

Kerry Sautner
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

We stand at a critical crossroads, with multiple urgent priorities that must be addressed in partnership with our new superintendent, families, educators, and the broader community.

One of the most immediate needs is the development of a robust, measurable strategic plan. This plan must be rooted in fiscal best practices, focused on student outcomes, and driven by clear goals and accountability. Our candidates are committed to ensuring this plan reflects community input and addresses the diverse needs of our students.

At the same time, our schools must continue to foster healthy, transparent community engagement. That means strengthening open and accessible communication, rebuilding trust between families and the district, and ensuring every student, parent, and staff member feels seen, heard, and respected.

We are also committed to nurturing the whole child, academically, emotionally, and physically. That includes creating rigorous, inclusive learning environments, supporting student mental health, and ensuring that every child can thrive in a safe, supportive setting.

Feeling safe and in a trusted environment is key to this, a major priority for this Board and District is addressing harmful behaviors is another top priority. We have seen an increase in antisemitism and other forms of discrimination in our schools. Working with the Board and school team we have expanded anti-bias education, improved tracking of incidents, and forging new partnerships with organizations like the Jewish Federation's JCRC, the Weitzman Museum, and Facing History. We have recently reengaged Stand with Us and the school team, under Dr. Ranelli's leadership will continue this important work. We are focused on expanding our work to increase a safe school community and reducing discrimination and bulling for all of our students.

I am deeply committed to protecting and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in LMSD. Despite recent attempts to undermine this work

nationally, I believe this is the foundation of public education and the work is essential to creating a district where all students feel safe and empowered. A priority must be placed on our students with special needs including advocating for services and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Anna Shurak
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

1. Leadership Stability & Strategic Direction
LMSD has experienced frequent leadership changes. Now, with a new superintendent in place, our priority must be to rebuild stability and align around a clear, measurable strategic plan. The board must work in strong partnership with the administration and community, grounded in shared values: equity, academic excellence, fiscal responsibility, and transparency.

2. Fiscal Responsibility & Student Equity
We face a $5 million budget deficit. I am committed to protecting vital programs-such as special education, mental health supports, and core academics-while pursuing cost savings and improving budget transparency. We must also continue to close opportunity gaps so that every student is supported and prepared to succeed.

Question 3: School Choice: If your children do not currently attend LMSD schools, could you share your thinking behind that decision and how it might inform your perspective on the board?

Rebecca Brodsky
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

My Daughter is currently a 3rd grader at Penn Valley Elementary School with one year left at PVES before entering 5th grade at the Welsh Valley Middle School. My husband and I wanted to send our child to a district with excellent public schools and great opportunities for many activities.

Omer Dekel
Appearing on the Republican ballot

I have three children attending LMSD schools, so this question doesn't apply to me. My family's commitment to the district pushes me to serve and improve it for all students

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Juanita James Kerber
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

My child attends middle school in LMSD. We moved from South Philadelphia, and our decision reflects a strong belief in the value of public education—a perspective I bring to my work on the board.

Richard Lester
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

I have three children, my twins are college juniors that attended LMSD schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade. My youngest will graduate from Harriton in June 2025.

My wife and I are both products of public schools and we believe strongly in the value of a good public school education -- which we believe our kids have received at LMSD.

Why am I running for school board? In October 2023, my youngest son came home from school and suggested we watch the School Board Candidate forum prior to the November 2023 election. We watched the live stream and after about 30 minutes, he said to me, "you could be a really effective school board member and now that you have some time, you should run." This was not something I ever thought about, but I decided to learn more.

During 2024, I met with ~25 people including former LMSD school board members, school leaders in other districts, and our administrators and parents active in the schools. Instead of being scared of by the public scrutiny

and other challenges, I became excited by the opportunity to lead and try to improve an already good school district.

However this election turns out, the experience has been mostly positive and eye opening. I learned that I am not a good politician but am more confident than ever in my skills to be an effective board member. I have talked to many passionate parents who want to improve our schools. I have had great discussions with my wife and kids about the ups and downs of this process and am living our family values regarding the importance of education and taking action. When discussing my goals for a four-year tenure on the school board with my youngest son, he hoped that I would inspire other highly talented people to run and engage. I have already had one friend reach out to discuss the process because she considering running in 2027!!

Talia Nissim
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

My three children attend LMSD schools, so this question doesn't apply. My families reliance on the district drives my commitment to its success for all students.

Deena Pack
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

We are Orthodox Jews and prefer to have our children dual educated in both secular as well as biblical studies, and therefore all our children started in Jewish Day Schools. However, it turned out that Jewish day school was not a fit for my oldest daughter, who switched to Bala Middle School in 7th grade. She is currently finishing Junior year in LMHS. My middle daughter was evaluated and enrolled in LMSD in 2nd grade, but the district refused to provide her with the special needs support she required and only offered us special support once per week rather than daily. This would not have been enough for her, so we sent her to a Jewish day school that could support her. She is currently graduating 8th grade and will be attending a local private high school. Our youngest son requires gifted education and was in the district

starting in kindergarten. Due to significant antisemitic attacks-so serious that he became afraid to wear a Kippah to school, we removed him from LMSD after 4th grade and he is currently a 5th grader at Main Line Classical Academy. I am running for School Board to ensure that no child needs to leave our public schools due to needing more special education support or because they do not feel safe.

Jennifer Louise Rivera
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

I feel incredibly lucky to have a child in the LMSD school district at Cynwyd Elementary. As a multigenerational Lower Merion resident, this community holds deep roots for my family. The teachers and staff at Cynwyd don't just educate, they inspire, support, and truly see each child for who they are. Watching my child grow in such a nurturing environment brings me immense gratitude, and I feel a profound sense of connection.

Jacob Rudolph
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

I do not yet have children; I bring the freshest possible student-level perspective. Having just spent 13 years in our classrooms, I understand how policies affect learning daily and can translate that insight directly into board action.

Kerry Sautner
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

Choosing our local public home school was deeply important to me and my family. In full transparency, we had to work very hard to ensure our youngest child could attend his home school with the neurotypical peers he had grown up with since he was three years old. Today, we have one child currently in the Lower Merion School District and one who has recently graduated.

Every parent or guardian needs to make the best and right choice for their child and their family. There's no one-size-fits-all approach, and that diversity of experience is part of what strengthens a public school system. I believe it's key, almost a necessity, for those in governance to have a direct connection to the schools, educators, and student community.

That lived experience keeps us grounded in the realities of our district and the impact of our decisions.

Anna Shurak
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

All three of my children are part of the LMSD community. My older daughters attend Bala Cynwyd Middle School, and my youngest will begin kindergarten at Cynwyd Elementary during my next term. This gives me firsthand understanding of how board policies impact families and students. As both a board member and parent, I have walked school halls, collaborated with educators, and navigated support systems. These experiences give me an authentic perspective on what's working and where we can improve. My approach is rooted in active listening, respect for educators, and an unwavering commitment to public education. I advocate for policies that prioritize student well-being, academic excellence, and family engagement.

Question 4: School Choice: If your children do not currently attend LMSD schools, could you share your thinking behind that decision and how it might inform your perspective on the board?

Rebecca Brodsky
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

The balancing of the diverse stakeholders is like a table, each group represents a leg on a table. We want to listen to concerns from all sides and then we can find a compromise to make everyone satisfied. Board Members need to have an open mind to be able to communicate with all stakeholders in order to make an equitable decision.

Omer Dekel
Appearing on the Republican ballot

Balancing the needs of students, families, educators, and taxpayers requires open communication and data-driven decisions. I'll engage stakeholders through meetings, surveys, and outreach to hear all voices and concerns. My tech background taught me to set clear metrics—like student performance, budget efficiency, and satisfaction. In leading diverse teams, I've learned collaboration drives results. I'll bring that to LMSD, fostering consensus on shared goals like safety and quality education, ensuring decisions benefit the entire district while respecting every perspective.

Juanita James Kerber
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

Strong schools require input from all stakeholders—students, families, educators, and taxpayers. I support using tools like surveys, community forums, and lessons learned from collected data. Our educators require strong support and ample training to carry out the rigorous work of teaching all of our children. As a board member, I would be dedicated to working with the other board members and ensure input from all stakeholders are heard.

In speaking with neighbors and hearing from community members, I've heard concerns about rising taxes. While funding quality schools is essential, we also need to be mindful of older residents and residents without children in the system. Exploring budgets that minimize tax increases is a worthwhile goal to show we hear all voices."

Richard Lester
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

Our community should be able to thrive on its diversity.

I will reiterate my prior points about the importance of good governance as an essential framework for tackling the diverse needs of the community. A

comprehensive strategic planning and goal setting process provides the guideposts to make complex decisions based on the district's priorities.

At the April 28th School Board Meeting, the Administration presented the 2025-26 budget that included $5 million of budget cuts. The challenge has been that there is no transparency regarding what was being cut. The administration presented the elimination of certain late bus runs (these cost savings were not quantified) and no other cuts were mentioned. Then in public comment, a few Lower Merion High School students advocated for certain music classes that were being eliminated.

The issues here are multi-layered. First, without clear goals and priorities, there was no real framework to prioritize where to make the budget cuts. Secondly and most importantly, there was no transparency in the presentation of the changes nor was their open dialogue at committee meetings about the various options.

I experienced a high functioning board using its mission and priorities to make clear decisions in the aftermath of October 7th as a member of the Penn Hillel board. A high-profile donor to the University and Penn Hillel was pressuring the organization to publicly condemn the school president, Liz Magill. Our board discussions were guided by our mission which was to 'serve the students' of the university and publicly condemning the president did not seem to serve the students. The board decided to continue to work behind the scenes to achieve important priorities that would support the students. Over time, Dr. Magill resigned and through quiet diplomacy with the university administration, Penn Hillel has been able to achieve a number of important priorities to serve the students. The moral clarity of having clear objectives drove decision-making and very positive results.

Talia Nissim
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

Balancing the needs of students, families, educators, and taxpayers takes more than good intentions—it requires open communication, transparency, and trust. As a parent of three kids in LMSD, I know how important it is to feel

heard and included in the decisions that shape our schools. That's why, if I'm elected, I'll prioritize real dialogue with the community.

I plan to host regular town halls and create working groups where parents, educators, students, and community members can come together, share concerns, and help shape the direction of our district. Decisions should be based not just on data, but on what we're actually hearing from the people most affected. Our district is stronger when more voices are at the table.

My work with the Interschool Council and community organizations like the Jewish Community Relations Council and the NAACP has shown me how powerful it is when people with different experiences come together and really listen to one another. I've learned how to navigate tough conversations and build bridges—and I'm ready to bring that same approach to the school board.

We may not always agree, but we all want the same core things: strong schools, smart spending, and an environment where our kids can thrive. I believe in focusing on those shared priorities and building consensus that respects the diverse needs of our community.

As a mom, I understand how personal these issues are. I also know that every family's experience is different. I'll advocate for collaborative, thoughtful solutions that reflect our community's values and help all students succeed.

I'm running because I believe LMSD can be a model for inclusive, effective governance—where decisions are made with transparency, grounded in both data and compassion, and shaped by the people who live them every day. We all want what's best for our kids—and together, we can make that happen.

Deena Pack
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

Balancing the voices of various stakeholders starts with listening and working to find common ground. As a nurse and proven leader, I know how to collaborate across perspectives and find ways to unite the team around areas of congruence. I would hold forums to hear all the voices in the discussion

and make myself available and fully transparent about the decision to be made and the factors involved. I am an upfront communicator, which will hopefully build trust with all stakeholders. I believe in data-driven, evidence-based actions and would ensure that all decisions made by the Board are well researched, have measurable goals, timelines for evaluation of success, and are always rooted in advocacy for our students and their success. I'll prioritize empathy and teamwork to craft solutions that show value and respect to all stakeholders while keeping the district's promise of a high-quality education.

Jennifer Louise Rivera
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

I believe that we are incredibly fortunate to be in a district known for its excellence. However, we need to continue improving, adjusting, and evolving to meet the growing needs of our students and community. I'm running to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive, whether it be students in underserved communities, children with disabilities, or from diverse cultural backgrounds. Every voice matters, and I will be a tireless advocate for public education that reflects our shared values of opportunity, respect, and fairness. I believe that good governance starts with open dialogue and effective collaboration. That means not only engaging directly with educators, administrators, and families, but also honoring the trust taxpayers place in us to use resources wisely and equitably.

We are in a pivotal moment for public education, one that demands strong leadership and expertise to face the challenges we know the Trump administration's policies will inevitably bring to our community. Building relationships with administrators, teachers, parents, and the community at large is more important than ever to ensure Lower Merion School District's resiliency. I am proud to be endorsed by our two US Congresswomen, State Representatives, State Senator and County Commissioners. These are critical relationships for our district to navigate the potential strain on our resources.

Right now, we are also facing challenges here in our own backyard that demand our attention. We've seen tensions in our community, particularly surrounding recent struggles faced by our Jewish community following the

horrific terrorist attacks of October 7th. It is imperative that we stand together against hate in all its forms. We must recognize that trauma affects different people in different ways. Instead of letting these struggles divide us, I hope to be a bridge for us to come together, heal together, and listen and support one another. Our schools should be sanctuaries for learning, and it is our job to provide them the tools and environment they need to succeed.

That's why I am running now. This is the moment for leadership that prioritizes unity, inclusivity, and progress. We need a school board that understands the importance []

Jacob Rudolph
Appearing on the Democratic and Republican ballots

I would start every decision with one question: What does each learner need to thrive? Then work backward to policy and budget. That means three things:

- Transparency: publish clear dashboards on evaluation timelines, bias-incident statistics, and response times so every stakeholder sees progress or lack thereof.
- Collaboration: include students and educators on standing committees that shape curriculum and climate.
- Fiscal responsibility: end costly, drawn-out litigation by adopting a "mediate first, litigate last" legal strategy, saving taxpayer dollars while serving families faster.

Kerry Sautner
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

Our primary role as school board members is governance, overseeing the district and the superintendent. In many ways, this means serving as a bridge between the community and the school leadership team. Our responsibility is to listen, lead, and guide the district's work with input from all stakeholders. That requires balancing the needs of students, families, educators, and the

broader community. It involves a lot of listening to learn, a willingness to compromise, and asking thoughtful questions to understand all perspectives.

One of my goals is to foster a stronger connection between the school leadership team and the community. I believe less tension and more understanding comes from early and transparent engagement, long before a policy vote or decision is made. That kind of transparency builds trust and leads to more thoughtful outcomes.

We must also prioritize listening to our students. They navigate a very different world than we did, and their insights and expertise are crucial. Educators, too, are vital to this process. They help us understand both the challenges and the solutions. Our job as board members is to govern strategically and responsibly, informed by those who are directly impacted by our decisions.

I deeply value the conversations that happen during committee meetings and community dialogues. In the past, the Board hosted community discussions in neighborhood settings to explore complex issues, like full-day kindergarten, preserving Oakwell, and adjusting school start times. These were tough conversations, with many passionate and competing perspectives, but they helped build connection and shared ownership in our decisions. I would love to bring that model back, especially with our new superintendent who has fresh ideas for meaningful engagement.

At the end of the day, no one stakeholder group is going to get everything they want, but everyone should get something they need. It's about compromise, advocacy, and collaboration. That means letting go of "winning" and focusing instead on progress. This work is hard, but it's worth it when we remember that we're not here to fight, we're here to move our community forward, together.

Anna Shurak
Appearing on the Democratic ballot

Good governance starts with listening-especially to voices historically left out. I approach board decisions with data, research, and community input at the

forefront. I believe in increasing financial transparency through quarterly reports, an interactive budget dashboard, and clear communication linking expenditures to outcomes.

Balancing stakeholder needs means weighing trade-offs and staying focused on our mission: providing excellent public education for every child. That includes supporting our educators, using taxpayer dollars wisely, and ensuring each student thrives in a safe, inclusive, and academically rich environment.

Candidates Appearing on Primary Election Ballots in May 2025

Name	Ballot	Email	Website
Rebecca Brodsky	Democrat	RebeccaBrodskyforLMSDSB@gmail.com	
Omer Dekel	Republican	info@omerdekel-lmsd.com	https://www.omerdekel-lmsd.com/team
Juanita James Kerber	Democrat	juanitajkerber.jjk@gmail.com	https://juanitajkerber.com/about
Richard Lester	Democrat/Republican	Richlester999@gmail.com	https://www.rich-lester.com/
Talia Nissim	Democrat/Republican	info@talianissim-lmsd.com	https://www.talianissim-lmsd.com/
Deena Pack	Democrat/Republican	info@deenapack-lmsd.com	https://www.deenapack-lmsd.com/
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Jacob Rudolph	Democrat/Republican	jacob@jacobforlmsd.com	https://www.jacobforlmsd.com/
Kerry Sautner	Democrat	electlmsd@gmail.com	https://www.electlmsd.com/
Anna Shurak	Democrat	electlmsd@gmail.com	https://www.electlmsd.com/