

Republican-American (Waterbury, CT)

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8 candidates pursue 4 seats on Region 14 school board

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Eight candidates are running for four Region 14 Board of Education seats June 7. Four Woodbury candidates are vying for two slots available, and four Bethlehem candidates are seeking the two positions available from that town. Terms are for three years.

Four seats on the current board, filled by Woodbury's Deborah Corsico and Salvatore Catalano, and Bethlehem's John Samoska and Tom Keilty, are not up for election in 2007.

Below is a look at the candidates, including their view on the controversial school reconfiguration issue. That plan would convert Bethlehem Elementary School, currently a K-5 facility, into a primary school for all the district's kindergarten through second-graders. Mitchell Elementary School in Woodbury, currently K-4, would then house all the district's third- through fifth-graders. Reconfiguration is scheduled to begin with the 2007-08 academic year, although Bethlehem and Woodbury voters may force a districtwide referendum on the issue this summer.

Bethlehem candidates

Name: Carla Juhas

Age: 41

Address: Paddy Hollow Road, Bethlehem

Occupation: manager of development engineering, FuelCell Energy, Danbury

Marital status: husband Paul Juhas; daughter Molly, 11, student at Woodbury Middle School

Previous elected offices held: none

Volunteer work: volunteer teacher at Career4Girls Camp sponsored by Education Connection; preschool religious education instructor at Sacred Heart Church, Southbury

Education: Homer Central High School, Homer, N.Y.; B.S. in mechanical engineering from Rochester Institute of Technology; M.S. in engineering science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; MBA in finance from New York University

Why are you running for the Board of Education?

"I am concerned about the quality of education offered by the school district. I moved to Bethlehem with my family three years ago and while we thoroughly enjoy living in the region and regard the schools generally as positive, I feel that, academically, Region 14 can do a much better job preparing children for college and the workplace.

"I've reviewed the Region 14 Strategic Assessment Report which compares student

performance in Region 14 to students in comparable school districts. This report reveals numerous shortcomings in the system. That is why I believe that improving and standardizing curriculum are the key tasks facing the district."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"The school reconfiguration plan is, unfortunately, a necessity. Due to some historical factors, such as the inability to pass school improvement and expansion initiatives, the most practical near-term way to house students properly is reconfiguration. The region needs to bring Woodbury fifth-graders back into an appropriate school community as soon as possible.

"The curriculum inequalities in the two towns need to be eliminated. I believe that every child in Region 14 should have equal access to educational opportunities, and not be limited based on his or her address. These are the reasons I do not oppose reconfiguration."

Name: Stephen J. Paluskas

Age: 56

Address: P.O. Box 37, Bethlehem

Occupation: home helper for handicapped people

Marital status: single, never married

Previous elected offices held: Democratic Town Committee chairman; Region 14 Board of Education, 2004 to present

Volunteer work: American Legion, Lions Club, Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem Food Bank and treasurer for Salvation Army

Education: Woodbury High School vocational-agriculture program; B.A. from Adams State College, Colorado

Why are you running for Board of Education?

"To continue the work I've started in rebuilding Mitchell School and to maintain the vo-ag program."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"For (it). All-day kindergarten saves \$10 million on rebuilding costs and improves plans for education improvements by allowing full horizontal and vertical integration of curriculum."

Name: Susan Scherf

Age: 41

Address: 19 Tousi Road, Bethlehem

Occupation: Stay-at-home mom

Marital status: husband David J. Scherf; daughter Claire B., 8, third-grader and son Leo G., 6, kindergarten

Previous elected offices held: none

Volunteer work: Nantucket Island bird banding, Frost Valley YMCA wildlife rehabilitator, Claryville, N.Y.

Education: Nonnewaug High School, Woodbury; Hartwick College, B.S. in anthropology

Why are you running for Board of Education?

"There needs to be a bridge between the Board of Education/administrators and the citizens. Board of Education needs to be accountable for their decisions. That's why I am

running. I am accountable."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"What needs to be questioned is the process in which reconfiguration came to be voted in. The Board of Education did not listen to the pleas of parents. They (board) have never presented the educational merits of reconfiguration. The board has never been democratic. The board has never given citizens of the region anything in writing to explain reconfiguration. The reasoning for reconfiguration is all moot at this point. The board needs to be a bridge between citizens.

"I am against the process of reconfiguration in general."

Name: Stephen F. Sordi

Age: 43

Address: 71 Auncient Oak Road, Bethlehem

Occupation: Connecticut state trooper (Washington resident trooper)

Marital status: wife Pamela Sordi; daughter Christina, 8 and Nicholas, 6, both students at Bethlehem Elementary School

Previous elected offices held: none

Volunteer work: adviser to Connecticut State Police Explorer Troop 074; adviser to Shepaug Youth Patrol; appointed member to Region 14 Building Committee; parent volunteer to Region 14 Transportation Committee

Education: Holy Cross High School, Waterbury; Connecticut School of Electronics, New Haven; Connecticut State Police Academy; holder of E-1 unlimited electrical contractor's license

What are you running for Board of Education?

"I would like to offer the community an opportunity to elect an individual who believes in the democratic process, has a high level of energy and is willing to make the commitment to a quality educational experience for our students, while being respectful to the taxpayers.

"I feel I have the skills to communicate clearly, think reasonably and work well with others to make decisions that will affect the students and members of the Region 14 community."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"I am concerned by the lack of research done and community input considered before the Board of Education approved Dr. (Robert) Cronin's idea to reconfigure the schools in our region. This proposal will have major effects on our communities that are far reaching and long term. Reconfiguration will result in longer bus rides and shortened school days. Reconfiguration is not a solution to overcrowding or improved curriculum.

"I believe it would have been in the best interest of the region if an exploratory committee had been formed and tasked with the responsibility of assessing the feasibility of the proposed reconfiguration."

Woodbury candidates

Name: William J. Barber

Age: 48

Address: 61 Old Grassy Hill, Woodbury

Occupation: patent attorney, partner at Ware, Fressola, Vander Sluys and Adolphson

LLP, of Monroe

Marital status: wife Erica Barber; children Caelan, 9, Benjamin, 15 months and Jeremy, 2 months

Previous elected offices held: none

Volunteer work: member of Connecticut Patent Law Association, volunteer hours over past 20 years helping people in relation to various legal matters in and out of courts in New York and Connecticut; youth basketball coach

Education: Sachem High School, Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y.; State University of New York at Stony Brook, B.S. in computer science and engineering; juried doctorate from Brooklyn Law School

What are you running for Board of Education?

"To bring all of my 20-plus years of legal and business experience to help all of the children in Region 14 get a better education, including bringing democracy, accountability and the voice of the people back into the Board of Education process; fighting to get the best possible value for our taxpayer dollars to educate our children; fighting for enrichment programs in all K-12 grade levels; working to set policy to advance a curriculum aimed at helping children meet their individual potential and working to set policy to promote the utilization of technology and the skills necessary to compete in a global marketplace."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"Reconfiguration, which will result in the dismantling of our traditional K-5 elementary schools in Bethlehem and Woodbury, is a change to the 1968 regionalization plan that requires the Region 14 Board of Education to bring a regional referendum to implement ... consistent with the law set forth in the Connecticut General Statutes, chapter 164, part III, sections 10-39 et seq., including section 10-47c. These regional statutes have been in place for almost 40 years in the State of Connecticut. Without such a regional referendum, reconfiguration is, and will always be, in violation of the law in the State of Connecticut."

Name: Charles E. Cosgriff

Age: 68

Address: 26 Bear Hill Road, Woodbury

Occupation: retired educator

Marital status: wife of 44 years Kathleen G. Cosgriff; children Mrs. Kathleen Cosgriff Carr, Charles E. Cosgriff Jr., Eileen M. Cosgriff and Patrick W. Cosgriff

Previous elected offices held: Region 14 Board of Education, 2004 to present, currently vice chairman

Volunteer work: Woodbury Parks and Recreation Commission, chairman six years, member eight years; Woodbury Boys baseball coach; Woodbury Lions Club, past president; Boy Scout Troop 480, merit badge counselor; Woodbury Selectman's Cable Franchise Advisory Committee

Education: Crosby High School, Waterbury; B.A. in history, St. Francis College; M.S. in elementary education; Southern Connecticut State University, professional diploma of advanced studies, educational administration and supervision

Why are you running for Board of Education?

"I wish to continue the work I have been involved in, namely pushing for and achieving

transparency in the budget process; to continue to ensure a sound educational environment for the region's students (best administrators, best supervisors, best teachers, best support personnel, best programs, best facilities)."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"I am for reconfiguration. It is a way of achieving what the region needs: students in kindergarten meeting other students for the first time and make friends and keeping that friendship that could continue through 12th grade; better use of resources - a special visiting program can be used by all the same grades, not having to move to the other grade school or not at all; better use of planning time; sharing of materials; consolidation of materials; better use of facilities; better use of personnel; better perception of and implementation of evaluations of personnel and students."

Name: Monica Gati

Age: 44

Address: 86 Pond Valley Road, Woodbury

Occupation: None

Marital status: husband Peter Gati; children Samantha, 19, Peter, 18, Kelsy, 16, Zachary, 11 and Jakob, 7.

Previous elected offices held: Region 14 Board of Education, 2004 to present, currently secretary

Volunteer work: Pack 54; St. Teresa's Church CCD instructor; Mitchell School Centennial Celebration Committee, 1999; World Languages Committee; Region 14 Anti-Bullying Task Force

Education: Saint Francis Preparatory High School, Fresh Meadows, N.Y.; B.B.A. degree from Hofstra University; juries doctorate from Brooklyn Law School

Why are you running for Board of Education?

"I want to use my decades of service to the community, my experience, my integrity, my professionalism and my commitment to make the Region 14 school system the best it can be, in the best and most direct way and I believe that is as a member of the Board of Education. I am committed to children and to do what is best for them. We need to be preparing children for the global environment in which they will one day be employed. Every decision I make is carefully considered, always keeping in kind the best interests of the children. I strongly believe that quality teachers, administrators and curriculum are essential to quality education.

"The Region 14 Board of Education, as are most boards I have worked on and observed, is made up of people who serve the community, not their own personal agenda. Boards work hard to resolve conflict together. I have experience in conflict resolution both through my legal work experience and my parent advocacy experience. It is naive to think that a position on the board means that you get exactly what you want because no one is smart as all of us combined. Let's keep in mind that serving on a board means you work with others to reach the best solution for the community as a whole."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"Consider how exciting and exhilarating it will be for the children in a K-2 school that can focus totally on literacy and numeracy. Imagine the possibilities for them. The school will be all about learning to read, simple mathematics and how to make lifelong friends.

Our children will be surrounded and supported by a group of professionals who will spend their days with the needs of the age 5-8 crowd at the forefront of their minds. A warm and nurturing environment can be created in a school built to be manageable for these young children.

"Kindergarten children whose parents are ready will be able to stay all day and thus eliminate the need for them to be flipped into a second K program or daycare situation. Because it is new this year parents can also opt for a half-day program. Two elementary schools will have been created that each bear an equal amount of students. This will allow equal attention by the building administrator to each student and professional in the building. All of the grade 3-5 staff will be housed under one roof which will strengthen the educational program by allowing more time for grade level teachers to share educational practices and strategies. Portables will be a thing of the past because the students will all fit in Mitchell School.

"Reconfiguration addresses the issues that have been plaguing Region 14 for some time. It is both educationally and fiscally sound. Reconfiguration utilizes the facilities and resources of Region 12 in the most efficient way. Reconfiguration will create a true educational community where the students will come together in kindergarten and have similar experiences through grade 12."

Name: George W. Hochsprung III

Age: 64

Address: 4 Heather Court, Woodbury

Occupation: educator, experienced pre-K through eighth grade in Danbury Public Schools, currently teaching gifted students in grades 6, 7 and 8.

Marital status: wife Dawn Hochsprung, principal of Bethlehem Elementary School; five daughters and seven grandchildren

Previous elected offices held: none

Volunteer work: child-centered volunteer work in Danbury, most recently in engineering competition and robotic design/programming

Education: Lakeland High School, Westchester County; University of Toledo, pre-med; U.S. Army; Western Connecticut State University

Why are you running for Board of Education?

"For three primary reasons: to facilitate more open dialogue between the Board of Education and the public so that the opinion of the people is heard, acknowledged, and considered before the board deciding on matters of broad consequence; to be an active participant in the process of adopting curriculum documents that hold teachers accountable to standards while ensuring them the flexibility to take full advantage of their instructional strengths in order to meet the needs of all learners; in response to the published insinuation of 'nepotism,' to assist the board in drafting a formal policy to address issues of potential conflict of interest between elected members of the Board of Education and themselves, members of their families, or those with other personal relationships in matters involving employment by the Board of Education, leadership positions in other school-based groups, or any business interest which might be impacted by a decision within the purview of the Board of Education."

Explain your position on the school reconfiguration issue and whether you are for it or against it.

"I believe that the decision-making process was flawed. Although there are times when

reallocating resources is appropriate, when such a move impacts the basic interactions among schools, families, and community, the Board of Education has an obligation to fulfill its responsibility to the people by actively seeking a broad perspective on the issue."

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