

**Name and address: Jonathan Rodriguez
1140 Congress**

I've been in town for about 25 cumulative years. I work at and teach for the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown. I teach acting and musical theater to neurotypical and neurodiverse students aged 3-35. I graduated Teaneck High in 2001 and hold a BFA in Musical Theater University of the Arts.

If you have any interest in what we do at Mayo, check us out on social media. Our students are phenomenal.

My wife Andrea and I have two kiddos- Cali and Skyler. Who both attend Teaneck Public Schools in 3rd grade and PreK. My parents also still live in town.

I've also been a board trustee for the past 3 years; I came to the board on the tail end of the last administration and spent most of my first year with an interim Superintendent. Finally, we hired Dr Spencer and a few months later the world and our town was rocked by what has been happening overseas. I think I've handled this contention with grace and consideration for all of the people whose hearts are hurting. (Without becoming a pushover)

Despite these challenges I've kept my focus on the students of teaneck and how we as a board can best serve them.

I've spent time developing and reading through policy with the policy committee, assessing the needs of our special needs students with the special education committee, developed curriculum goals with the the curriculum committee, and poured through vacancy reports with the personnel committee.

When students have needed a voice, I've tried to use mine- speaking out to protect their rights to free speech, privacy, and unpoliced safe schools.

I've voiced the concerns of parents alerting the administration to bussing issues and bullying issues.

When Dr Spencer first arrived I urged the administration to open their offices for parent meeting times- which they have done as well as creating a parental advisory team.

I think between my experience in Teaneck as a student and parent, my experience as an educator, and my experience as a board trustee make me the most qualified person on the ballot.

**1. Do you have or ever had children enrolled in Teaneck public schools?
Yes! 2- one is in 3rd grade and one is in Prek3**

**2. What is the role of a BOE member? Why are you running for Teaneck BOE?
A board members main role is oversight. The mission statement is to make sure the district is run well, but not to run the district.**

That includes developing and approving policy, approving budgeting & curriculum changes, negotiating with the unions, dealing with legal issues, HIB incidents and so much more.

To sum up the “why” I can simply say “for the students”. I feel a responsibility to give back to the community that made me, and I think my value-led decision making allows me to make the right choices for our kids. I want to be a voice for parents and teachers, and always keep our students hopes and dreams as my guiding light.

I want to continue to build a district that the community can trust & has our students best interests at heart.

3. Tell us about a time where you worked through a challenge with a team of people who did not agree on the best solution. How did you navigate conflicting views? How did you resolve the challenge?

I hope it’s okay that I give a general answer here- I’ve worn many hats within the theater community- actor, teacher, director, choreographer, props designer... the list goes on. Theater (specifically musical theater) is the most collaborative art form there is and criticism is part of the game. This leads me to being accustomed to being a part of, or witness to heated disagreements.

My mantra is to listen to all sides before considering my own opinion and to do my best to temper the emotions and egos that have led us to a point of contention; even when dealing with a divided board and unprecedented attacks on our students and staff.

Most importantly is to not take things personally, knowing that you have to give grace to receive grace and assuming the best in others.

I’ve done that as a board member and I hope to continue.

4. What do you think the current BOE is and is not doing well and how would you do things differently?

I think we’ve had our challenges with community perception. We have incredible students and a brilliant staff and we need to get even better at highlighting that to our community.

5. What are the biggest challenges facing our district right now and what solutions do you propose?

I think we still have a culture problem in our district and town. We hear of students saying things that worry us; antiquated words and ideas that have been CANCELLED years or decades ago. We need to do a better job of helping our students navigate the bias that still exists in our world and has trickled into our schools.

We also need a new focus on teaching our students how to deal with adversity. Antibullying initiatives are great, but I think we need to guide our students in productive ways of dealing with a “bully” when they inevitably encounter one.

6. How will you serve all of Teaneck’s diverse student population?

I am a product of Cuban, Chilean, Ukrainian, Austrian immigrants whose families found a home in Teaneck. Teaneck's diversity has always been what makes it such a special place. Along with having an eye on our schools culture, I want to continue to push for equity within our schools, making sure that students who need more get more.

7. How would you balance students' free speech rights with the need to create a safe learning environment for all students?

We need to continue to educate our students with the facts about current and historical events. I trust our kids to speak out on the issues that matter to them in a peaceful and respectful way. If that peace or respect is breached then obviously there would be consequences. But there are enough consequences for peaceful protest outside of our schools and I think we can continue to provide a safe place to practice dissidence.

Peaceful civil disobedience is an American and Teaneck tradition. It's a way of becoming an engaged active member of society; I've walked out of school in protest, I've marched in the streets of New York, Philadelphia and Teaneck for what I believe in. I believe our kids shouldn't be demonized or deal with harsh repercussions for being activists.

8. What measures would you propose to improve the school climate and specific to creating a safe learning environment?

Many measures are already in place but there's always room for growth and improvement. I'd like to see us utilize more monthly themes based around SEL. We do "respect month", but dedicating a month to other themes like 'activism', 'community' or 'culture' could be helpful. This is something I did in the charter school, and I felt like it contributed to a good student mindset.

9. What role do you think parents should play in determining what books are made available to the student population?

Of course we want to make sure that books are age appropriate, but beyond that- If the book isn't spreading hate or damaging misinformation, our students should have access to every resource available.

10. Where would you invest? And why? (academic, arts, extracurricular, athletics, etc)? Beyond our current investments in all of these things, I see arts and athletics as being areas for investment and improvements. We need to work with the town to fix our athletic fields, and I personally want to see more investments in our performance spaces. Our performing students need up to date tech in our auditoriums. The overall price to update the sound system at the high school auditorium should be less than 20k, which I see as a worthwhile investment in our kids.

11. What are your thoughts on the education budget?

It's large - 100 million annually.. and rightfully so. Our students are our most important investment. However our district is still finding challenges to pay for the things it wants and needs. In my time on the board I've seen the current administration be very cost conscious proposing cuts and diverting funds where they were needed, but we need to figure out how we can create more cash flow and ways to save.

One way we are trying to save is by taking our out of district placement suits to trial instead of settling the cases (which typically run the district 60k annually for 4 or more years). We've begun to win these cases and not only save money, but keep the student within our district where they can truly thrive.

12. What are the criteria you value most in a superintendent?

A good heart and a strategic plan. Both of which I've witnessed in Dr Spencer.

13. If elected, how will you promote transparency and accountability for yourself and fellow board members? How do you plan to ensure board compliance with regulatory requirements to minimize litigation costs?

I lead by example. I am honest with my peers and with the public and I hope my fellow board members do the same.

In recent months I've been in touch with administration and Board leadership to do my best to check that we are functioning in compliance.

I do want to say that I am always appreciate being called out when I am in the wrong; and the board, administration, and myself (being a trustee) made a mistake in regards to posting meeting times. I'm hopeful that going forward we will remain in compliance and that the community will see the effort first hand.

14. What aspects of Teaneck do you value.

Without teaneck I wouldn't exist. I am a product of what can happen when people of different background meet in Teaneck.

I value our school system, our beautiful homes and green spaces, our shoppes and of course our bagels. But it's the people who agree to live side by side, and who fight to keep our town diverse and inclusive that really make me love our town. Thats who I want to give back to. JGRodNYC@gmail.com