

Thomas LaColla

1) In recent years, the school district has annually proposed budget increases greater than inflation, and has actually proposed bond issues to finance regular spending (not new capital spending). What do you think of this approach to financial management?

My pledge to you is to vote to include only items in the budget and/or bond proposals that are necessary for the efficient management of the system and to only include funds for improvements that receive significant consensus from the community.

2) For many years, the Nyack school district has been operating with annual expense increases about doubling the rate of inflation. Do you consider this a problem? If so, what would you do about it?

First, I think it is important to realize that inflation data is typically based on the CPI index, which excludes volatile items like food and energy. Unfortunately, our school budget includes items for food, through contracts with providers, and energy, through bus contracts and our electric and heating bills. We all know that the cost of fuel, electricity, and gas have been skyrocketing at double digit percentage rates since 2001.

I do want to address the spirit of your question, which I think is: what are my views on increases in expenses across the board? I think the board needs to take a cautious but realistic look at any expense before we vote for annual increases. I do not believe that every item in a budget should automatically be increased annually or at least beyond the cost of providing the identical level of service from year to year. At times, we may wish to do more in a coming year than we did in a previous year and this would require a larger allocation of funds.

3) With the known ongoing gang involvement in the middle and high schools of the Nyack School District, what do you envision the part of the school board, administration, teachers and parents in the addressing of this issue.....other than budgetary concerns, as a resident of Nyack, I view this a major problem that needs be addressed and in an intelligent way.....a way that will show results and keep the community involved and have the school accept its responsibility as the "educator"this a question to be addressed by all and hopefully is presented for reply and not just determined of no interest....the candidates must be asked and respond intelligently as the children in your care are our future....

The part of the school board, administration, teachers and parents in the addressing gang problems has got to be an out in front approach. The School Board has to review safety procedures, interpersonal conditions between students, and provide the appropriate support and tools to the Superintendent and Educators. The school has to have activities and programs that begin at an early age and up through the oldest students in order to engage our children in constructive activities. The missing element in your question is the students themselves. Often times a child's peers will have the greatest influence on a child than any of the other people in their lives. Kids "look out" for each other, but they need to be taught the right way to "look out" for each other. Parents also have to survey who their kids are hanging out with and in what types of activities their kids are getting involved. Like so much else the right lessons at home translate to the right behavior away from home.

In addition, community programs like Back Door (A substance-free performance program run by teens, for teens) and Project Connect (an out of school suspension program at the Nyack Center) should be expanded to provide alternatives to destructive activities that may occur after school or when kids are out of school due to suspensions.

4) What do you consider to be more important- lower taxes or a better educational system? Choose only one, please.

A better educational system is more important and will pay back the home owner by increasing the desirability of the district and create upward momentum on home values. It is far more expensive for a district to lose property value by allowing their educational system to deteriorate.

5) Why do you want to be on the school board?

As a member of the community and a parent of two children that will attend Nyack schools for the next 12 years, I have a vested interest in the management of the district. I believe I can add value to the review and decision making process without conflict or bias. In addition to my devotion to the community and its students, my qualifications for Trustee include my past experience on the board of the Rockland Parent Child Center, and my professional experience in structuring and negotiating multilateral financing packages with private and government entities.

6) What new or changed initiatives would you support at the middle and high school level to combat gang activity, especially given recent events at Nyack High School and in the community.

An effective way to curb gang activity is through engagement. Since no one initiative will work on all kids because they are individuals with individual interests, we must offer an array of activities to engage them. Activities such as sports, fine arts, performing arts, and many other co-

curricular programs can make a positive difference in the lives of our students. Also, please see my answer to question (3) as there are parallels between the two.

7) What if any specific improvements would you advocate for on the elementary school level to better challenge and meet the needs of academically advanced students?

Bringing in programs like the Academic Olympics, and H.S. style Debate Teams to the elementary schools can be effective. Also, allowing for flexible curriculum so that Educators can allow more advanced students to move beyond standard course work and better challenge themselves is appropriate. Multiage class rooms also provide an opportunity for 1st and 3rd graders to be exposed to 2nd and 4th grade course work throughout the year.

8) Would you support another bond proposal to fund capital improvements in the school district? If so, what changes would you propose from the last bond proposal and how would you make the bond more palatable to voters?

Yes I would but only to include items for improvements that receive significant consensus from the community. In addition, I would try to tailor the proposal so that it can be flexible. That is, to allow changes to be made from start to finish.

The bond can be made more palatable to the voters if it were presented as a graduated bond. A graduated bond allows voters to approve different tiers of a project. For example: Part A: a new roof, and fire safety equipment, Part B: Everything in Part A plus Air Conditioning in the Music Rooms, and Part C: Everything in Parts A & B plus new ball fields at the High School and McCallman Field.

9) Head Start is a great success. It helps even the playing field for all children. Do you see evening the playing field for all children as a priority in our schools? If so, how do you think we can help the schools better achieve this?

Yes. In a single class room not all kids arrive with the same readiness to learn. Stressors at home like broken families, financial difficulties, work responsibilities and language barriers exist for some while others arrive in the morning equipped with encouragement from parents and role models and all the benefits of a good home life.

We can help the schools better achieve an even playing field through mentoring programs, after school programs, and through guidance counselors, which can help children navigate opportunities available to them.

10) How do you see the School Board interacting with the Schools' Superintendent?

The interaction between the board and the Superintendent should be one of encouragement and support provided the Superintendent is carrying out the mission created by the school board. The School Board is a check on the Superintendent. The Superintendent's performance should be regularly appraised for effectiveness.

11) What is your position on the effectiveness of school uniforms in promoting a more disciplined student body, and in leveling the playing field in a district with such broad range of incomes.

I personally went to school where there was a dress policy that required me to wear dress pants, dress shirt and a dress tie every day. This did promote greater attentiveness and discipline but I am not sure I have an opinion on whether we should bring such requirements to our students. I will have to think more about the issues you raise and whether they can be addressed by a dress code or uniform program. I hope you can accept this as an answer.

12) I've heard that over 75% of the annual budget is devoted to staff and administrative costs. That doesn't leave a lot of room for new programs without significant tax increases.

a) Do you have any ideas about decreasing costs without hurting educational programs?

I would like to investigate the possibility of sharing services with other school districts. For example: purchasing and printing, waste disposal, technology and telecommunications services (technical service agreements), payroll processing, food and fuel purchases. Also we could reduce the amount of school bus idling to save gas and improve air quality and fight to have currently unfunded mandates funded by the legislature. In addition, grant writing by the district and private advocacy groups can have a powerful effect in raising funds.

b) Would you support formation of a committee, composed of business leaders with an accounting background, to examine best practices in other districts for making recommendations on how Nyack can maintain high educational standards while reducing overhead costs?

Yes. I think committees like these can prove valuable and insightful.