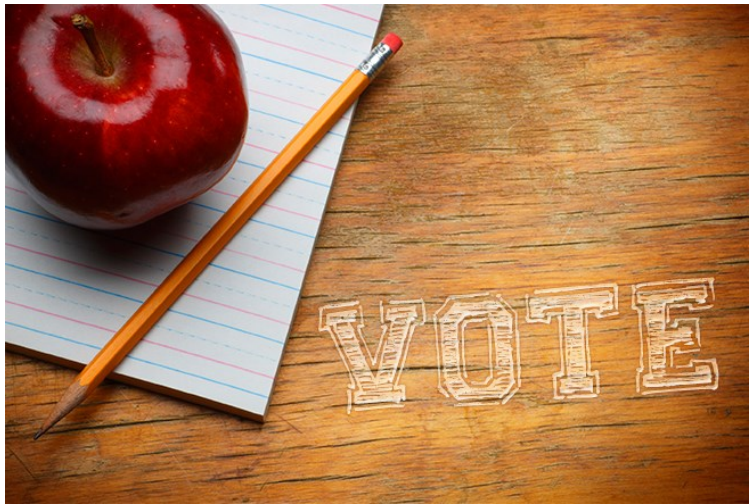


*Lincoln/Roosevelt School PTO invites you to*

# **MEET THE CANDIDATES NIGHT**



**Monday, October 23, 2023**

Beginning at 7:00 p.m.

**Lincoln/Roosevelt School Auditorium**

34 N. Hillside Avenue, Succasunna, NJ 07876

***Don't forget to vote on November 7, 2023!***

**Host:** Lincoln/Roosevelt PTO  
**Moderator:** League of Women Voters

**Candidates for the Roxbury Board of Education**

*(listed in alphabetical order):*  
*(Three, 3-year terms available)*

***Camilo Bonilla***

***Heather Champagne***

***Anne Colucci***

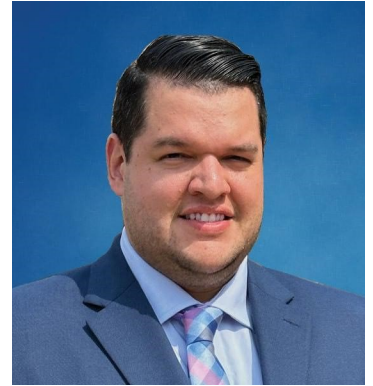
***Valerie Galdieri***

***Dan Masi***

***Kimberly Schwartz***

## **Camilo Bonilla**

Camilo "Milo" Bonilla is a graduate of William Paterson University where attained a degree in Mathematics. Milo also has a master's degree in School Administration with a specialization in Bilingual Education. With a decade of teaching experience, Milo has worked for the city of Passaic as a bilingual Mathematics teacher where he teaches underprivileged, Spanish-speaking students that have recently immigrated to the United States. In his tenure at his alma mater, Passaic High School, he created the bilingual tutoring program to assist students before and after school with their coursework, pioneered the APEX virtual credit recovery program that helps students recover missing coursework or help working students maintain their studies outside of school hours, and created a scholarship with his wife to assist graduating Navy ROTC cadets with a \$500 cash scholarship to assist with college, trade school, or military enlistment expenses.



Milo has lived in Roxbury for 4 years with a son attending Jefferson Elementary School.

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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

In my experience as a teacher I have witnessed the negative effect poor parent involvement and political agendas have on a community and its students. I want to make parents the backbone of an educational community where they will support and contribute to the growth of every student and school.

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### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

The biggest challenges facing our schools are: 1.) declining school performance, 2.) complex political involvement, 3.) accountability, and 4.) transparency.

1. Roxbury has been on the decline in state-testing performance for the past 5 years. It is critical that the board members, in collaboration with teachers, find solutions to return Roxbury to the high-performing district it once was.
  2. There is a large group of individuals in Roxbury that wish to wedge schools in between parents and children. I intend to remove said policies to avoid having parents, who are the single most important people to the educational development of a student, become adversaries to schools. Instead, I intend to ensure that parents are the schools greatest allies.
  3. Over the course of the past 50 years, the attack on teaching and teachers has caused schools across the country to fail. With policy after policy causing teacher workloads and stress levels to increase, having negative effects in the classroom, everything has been behind the veil of "this is being done to help the children." With 1 out of 5 teachers leaving the profession before their fifth year in NJ, it's critical that we now begin to hold the other players in education accountable, the administration. A 99% retention rate state-wide, only 1-in-20 administrators retiring each year, and salaries that go well into the \$250K+, it's important that we hold these individuals to the same rigorous and stern standards that we have held teachers to.
  4. Transparency in all levels of education will allow community members to be informed with the intricacies of Roxbury schools. Ensuring that facilities are well managed, transportation equipment is up-to-date and maintained, that schools are equipped with the necessary materials and staffing needed to reach educational goals, and that Roxbury residents have live, digital access to board meetings so that they can all be informed of the decisions of board members, are all things I wish to aid in achieving during my tenure as board member.
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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

I would like to create a community of parents and students that will transform Roxbury education into an exciting experience for all children. To change the idea of education from one that students must undergo, to one that children are eager to do. That the schools of Roxbury work towards producing high-performing academics, but to also produce individuals with strong character that are ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow.

*"Education is the foundation upon which our community's future is built. As a candidate for the Board of Education, I'm committed to ensuring that every child in Roxbury has access to a quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential. Together, we can shape the future of our community through the power of education. Join me on this journey, and let's make a lasting impact on the lives of our children. Your vote is not just a choice; it's an investment in a brighter tomorrow for all of us."*

## Heather Champagne

My husband, Craig and I, moved to the Landing section of Roxbury 19 years ago. Our daughter Danielle is a senior at Roxbury High School.

Professionally, I have worked in the legal field for nearly 30 years. I am presently employed as an employment law paralegal for a major healthcare system. I previously worked for 18 years as a paralegal at plaintiffs' medical malpractice law firm; many of the clients I served were catastrophically disabled children with a wide variety of educational and medical needs.

I have a Bachelors of Arts in Spanish and Political Science from Drew University. I have utilized my bilingual skills by serving as an English as a Second Language tutor since college. I am a current sitting Board member. In that capacity, I am chair of the Policies and Governance committee and serve on Personnel and Education committees as well as a liaison for the Inclusivity Committee. I am a proud six year member of the Roxbury Woman's Club, have been serving our community through Lasagna Love for the past two years, was PTA president of Nixon Elementary School from 2014-2016 and was a Girl Scout parent volunteer from 2014-2022.



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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

As the parent of a school aged child and wife of a high school English teacher, I have a vested concern and interest that our students receive an education that prepares them for life beyond the Roxbury school system. I am mindful and aware that in order for students to thrive in the classroom, they all must be made to feel safe, seen and included in their environment.

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### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

Teacher retention is one of the biggest challenges we face. Part of it can be explained by COVID, but it is known that salaries, especially on the lower ends of the salary step guide, are not as competitive as other towns. We have lost state funding and have had to do more with less money so need to find other ways to attract and keep our teaching talent.

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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

- Live streaming – I pushed for streaming when I was first elected and we presently have audio recordings, but it is not enough. COVID proved we are capable of doing live streaming. I have been vocal about wanting video streaming with the ability for residents unable to attend (due to disability, lack of childcare or any other reason) to contemporaneously hear what is going on from the horse's mouth. Video will also allow people to see "who" is speaking – as our current audio recordings are a challenge to follow. This will allow equity for all our residents.
- Voting in schools – With police officers no longer being legally permitted to stand guard at polling booths, the schools that host voting booths twice a year are left vulnerable to outsiders. Although the ultimate decision in whether voting can be removed from schools lies with the County Board of Elections, we could convert a snow day and close the schools on Election Day instead until such time as we are able to remove voting from the schools.
- Teacher retention – in the absence of available funds, find other ways to attract and retain our teachers. I would like to see school climate assessment surveys, exit interviews, mentorship of new teachers beyond the mandatory first year pairings and recognition. We need to ensure that our schools are where teachers want to be.
- Future readiness – I recognize that our scores have taken a hit in math and reading, as have most schools across the country. There is definite learning loss that must be addressed. While we work on that, we also must look toward the evolution of the jobs market. In this age of rapid technological advances, many jobs performed by humans will be outsourced to machines; conversely, many of the careers that will be available to a current 3rd grader don't even exist yet. Thus, we have to be mindful of how we prepare our students of today for the jobs of tomorrow. As an incumbent, I am proud to have supported the development of, and will continue to support the expansion of, our Pathways programs. The Pathways programs allows students to explore programs that may affect their future trajectory, take courses that will make them more marketable and, in some cases, allow them to become certified in a field, effectively giving them an advantage over other recent graduates.

*"As a parent with a school aged child, I have a vested interest in ensuring that all our children are able to learn, succeed and thrive in the classroom and in life. I want to work to ensure that families and teachers have access to information and tools which will enable them to advocate for our children's education."*

## Anne Colucci



My late husband Bob and I moved to the Succasunna section of Roxbury 28 years ago. We have two children who graduated from the Roxbury school system; my son graduated in 2001, and my daughter graduated in 2009. I graduated from East Orange Catholic School and am a retired administrative assistant from the Essex County Vocational School in Newark, New Jersey. I currently work as a certified home health aide for Home Instead Senior Care in Succasunna.

In 2017, I was elected to the Roxbury Board of Education. I take my duties seriously and have continued to advance my knowledge and understanding of a board member's obligations by attending workshops and classes. I became a "Certified Board Member" in 2019 and advanced to "Master Board Member" in 2023. I took my commitment seriously while on the board and regularly attended meetings. I have acted as a chair of the Facilities Committee and serve on the Personnel (previous chairperson), Negotiations, and Finance committees. I am also the Town Council liaison and serve on the Ad Hoc community to investigate moving voting out of the Roxbury School System.

I am an active member of many areas within the Roxbury community. It's not surprising to see me at graduations, sporting events, musicals, plays, and other community events because I genuinely enjoy it. I have known many children in this town who went through the Roxbury Schools, got married, and moved back to raise their children here. To me, that says a lot about their experience.

Giving back to the community is an important piece of who I am. I belong to the Saint Therese Church, where I am the 8th grade CCD class instructor, teach the two-year confirmation class, and run the community service program for the confirmation candidates. Additionally, I am a founding member of the Saint Therese Church youth group outreach program and a past member of Roxbury's lacrosse, field hockey, and football parents' clubs. For the last 15 years, I have served as the VFW Auxiliary's trustee. Over the previous six years, I have been volunteering on the "Friends of Social Services" Committee.

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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

I love living in town, but even more, I love being involved in the community! I am a parent, taxpayer, and community member dedicated to ensuring that the town continues moving in a positive direction. I want this town to be a place people are proud to call home. Being elected to the Roxbury Board of Education again will allow me to continue focusing on getting back to basics, back to where we once were, and improving the Roxbury educational system. We have made a lot of advancements and upgrades to our schools. Many I am proud to be a part of. However, there is still more to do. I will collaborate with the teachers, students, parents, administration, and other Board of Ed members to help contribute to the success of all Roxbury students.

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### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

Three years ago, when I ran for the Board of Ed, the impact of COVID on the Roxbury School System was the most significant challenge board members, students, faculty, and the community faced. In 2023, our school system's biggest challenge is recovering from those challenges. We must get back to the basics, focusing on core subjects like math, science, ELA, trades, and the creative arts. We need to improve the academic performance of all students who were negatively impacted by the pandemic. It's time to get back to educating our students and preparing them to be better suited for college, vocational schools, or entering the workforce.

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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

My priority is to continue increasing community outreach to ensure their voices and opinions are heard. I know the taxpayers of this town have concerns about curriculum, where their monies are being spent, and that they are being used responsibly. Additionally, I would like to continue to collaborate with fellow board members between the various committees to increase transparency and productivity with one another.

*"I genuinely love this town and want what is best for the students in our school system. I'm honest, sincere, willing to listen to other's viewpoints, and yet, stand by my convictions even if it's not the most popular opinion. I promise to vote with what I think is right and not just go along with the others. If elected, I will work with the board of education members, administration, and community as a cohesive group to bring the focus "back to the basics" of education; I will fight to keep Roxbury Strong and help provide the resources to advance our student's opportunities as well as, improve student performance."*

## **Valerie Galdieri**



I am a single mom with a son attending Eisenhower Middle School, a lifelong resident, and a Roxbury High School graduate. I have a degree in Visual Communications and am technically proficient. I have been working for a cybersecurity company where my responsibilities for the last 16 years have included marketing/graphic design, office administration, and project coordination.

I am running for Board of Education because Roxbury is my home. I grew up here and want today's kids to get the same quality education Roxbury has always been prided on. I am a highly involved parent and have regularly attended the Roxbury BOE meetings only to find that issues within the school system are being ignored. I am running because most of this seems political. As an avid reader, I learned that particular areas are guidelines, not mandates. These guidelines should be implemented with the protection of all kids in mind. We need more discussion and feedback from the community. I am not a deeply involved political person. However, I am a mom, and I want to see more focus on electives, special education, and the core subjects such as ELA and Math.

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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

I want to bring a focus back on academics and away from the political agendas and distractions that are currently plaguing our district. That means holding people accountable and transparency between the board, administration, and parents. I support live-streaming BOE meetings and the community to speak about their concerns. If there is an issue in the schools, I want parents to come forward and inform us so that we can hold the administration accountable. I will work to keep students safe by enforcing behavior expectations, adjusting our HIB policy if needed, and fighting to remove voting locations from schools. I will listen to the community's concerns with an open mind and make decisions accordingly. I will dedicate efforts to retaining valuable educators, fiscal responsibility, community engagement, and quality education for our students, such as special education programs and electives.

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### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

I have heard many concerns about the special education programs, increased bullying, parental rights, and lack of proficiency in the primary education of our students. Our special education is understaffed and underpaid. There is a significant lack of paraprofessionals and related service providers to meet the needs of our special education students. Schools across the country are promoting ideologies that confuse children who may not be mature enough to handle the concepts introduced. These are distractions from education that should not be there. And these decisions and mental health struggles are kept secret from their parents. Parental rights are clearly under increasing attack. Schools need to let parents do their jobs as parents and get back to the basics of education. Safety is essential, and teachers must fulfill that responsibility without keeping secrets. The reality is there are always policies in place to pinpoint red flags.

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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

I want to establish strong, trusting relationships in the district and work to address the issues that matter most to our community, with a priority on listening and advocating for the community, parents, students, and faculty. We must get back to the basics, focusing on core subjects such as technical skills, math, science, ELA, trades, and creative arts and ensuring the special education program has the tools they need to succeed to the parents' concerns, and being an advocate for all parents and students to regain excellence in all our schools.

*"Our school district needs to be stronger; as a community, we are ROXBURY STRONG! It is what I love about living in this town and raising my son here. The "strong" in Roxbury represents people coming together, listening, supporting, and helping a community member in need. Unfortunately, our education system could be stronger. Our academic system has lost sight of coming together and supporting the district with ALL needs in mind. We need to listen to the voices and concerns of the majority and make decisions based on the best interests of all students and families."*

## **Dan Masi**

When my wife Carolyn and I were starting our family with a 3-year-old and another child on the way, we wanted to establish roots in a town with a strong community feel, great education and municipal programs. We found that spot in Roxbury and moved into the Mooney Mountain section in 2005. Our daughter Julia went through the Roxbury Township school system, graduating in 2020, and our son Justin is currently a senior at Roxbury High School.

I am an engineer. For the last 18 years I have worked on homeland security applications in the field of radiological/nuclear detection. I have sat on US (ANSI) standards committees in this field and have been a US-appointed expert delegate to the international IEC standards committee in this subject area. Prior to this, I have worked in areas including computer architecture and telecommunications systems design.



As an undergraduate student at Stevens Institute of Technology, I earned my undergraduate Bachelors of Engineering degree in electrical engineering; during those four years I overloaded my schedule and simultaneously earned a Master of Science degree in Computer Science. Subsequently, while working full-time at Bell Laboratories, I returned to Stevens in the evenings and eventually earned a third degree, a Master of Science degree in Electrical Engineering.

I am an active amateur brass musician and have played in over a dozen community groups in NJ, including the Hanover Wind Symphony, where I served six years as the nonprofit's chairman and where I met my wife Carolyn, an instrumental music teacher.

For years I have had a strong interest in education. In 2014-2015 I was very active at the local and state level on issues of standardized testing (NJASK/PARCC transition), and have testified several times before the NJ State Board. I am an active organizer of a grassroots organization that advocates for public education in NJ. I was a member of the NJ Dept. of Education's steering committee for the 2015 Common Core Learning Standards revision for ELA and Math.

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### **What is your relationship to Roxbury and the School District?**

I have lived in Roxbury almost 18 years now, with one child completely through the school system and one almost there. During elementary school years I was present in the buildings frequently due to a child with special needs. I have participated in both Girl Scout and Boy Scout events with both of my kids during their earlier years. I have been very active with the music programs here and am currently in my 9th years as a member of the Roxbury High School Band Parents Association, where I served a number of years as Treasurer and am starting my second and final year as President.

During the Fenimore Landfill capping issues, I was a frequent and vocal activist, spending much of my time researching and testifying.

I have served two terms on the Roxbury Township Board of Education, 2017 through 2022, and was Board Vice President during the second term.

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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

Public education is the most significant legacy we can leave. Not only for my own kids, but for our society as a whole. A rich, full public education that serves every child is a vital component of our democracy. The value it brings communities can be measured in dollars and census counts; the value it brings our children and their futures is immeasurable. When a friend asked why I was running, I simply said "because I wasn't finished." I want to continue to bring the passion I have for quality education to bear on this most precious resource we have to offer; to provide every single Roxbury student with a place that makes them feel safe, valued, and gives them a path to be the best versions of themselves they can be.

## Dan Masi (Continued)

### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

One of our tougher challenges going forward will be the funding landscape. When NJ's S-2 bill changed state school funding beginning in 2018, Roxbury was one of the towns to see a change in their state funding that over a 4-year period resulted in the loss of millions of dollars. At the same time, we have innovative new programs to connect students with careers in the trades, in aviation, in athletic training/physical therapy, and we want to continue to broaden our offerings to make sure we aren't catering to just "most", but truly have something for all. We need to find creative ways to keep and attract our most important resource - our teachers - in this challenging landscape.

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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

- We know that kids learn when they are in an environment where they feel happy, safe, secure, and heard. If we truly care about providing every single child with their best growth potential, then I think it is important that every single child has an ally at school. Every student should have at least someone at the school - a teacher, an administrator - someone that they feel they can turn to and talk to when they need it. Hard to measure and maybe harder to plan to implement, sure. But I believe everyone who works for the district should always have this goal in mind.
- Community/parental involvement. I was one of the original board members who pushed for, and eventually got, audio recordings at board meetings. I also suggested that the board hold regular combined meetings with our school PTA/PTO leadership as another way to try to connect board and parents; those meetings started to happen, and I want to push them forward much further. I have been an advocate of virtual meetings / live video streaming since I started on the board and, while the climate was initially difficult to make this happen, I am convinced we can now successfully implement this. I think there are also creative solutions here that would result in more civic involvement from students, and benefit other curricular programs at the same time.
- Policy review. A Board does not actively run the district; that is the job of the superintendent and the administration they put in place. However, the Board sets the framework via policy. I think our board can do a better job of reviewing and updating existing policies, and educating themselves and the public on what exactly is in policy. I want to implement strategies for the board so that they have a better understanding of policies in place and can better discuss them with the community.
- Test scores. Anyone who knows anything about me knows that I am against some of the high-stakes standardized testing that often causes educators to "teach to the test" and that produces data that is distorted, often telling more about a student's economic or home condition than their actual learning. That said, there are published rankings that pit district-against-district based on exactly these scores. Where we see a drop, we need to be committed to understanding why and communicating that to our community. And where the drop is something we have real control over, we must address it. Student achievement needs to be always central to our mission...we should not be overly reactive to what a magazine publishes as a ranking, but we must strive to fully understand it in context.

*"I am passionate about public education. Every Roxbury student deserves the chance to become the best version of themselves, wherever that may take them. That means giving them choices, access to great educators, community involvement, and an environment where they feel safe, heard, and enabled. "*



## **Kimberly Schwartz**



My husband and I have been residents of Roxbury for 8 years. We have a 5-year-old son who just started kindergarten this fall at Nixon Elementary School.

Professionally, I have dedicated my career to supporting vulnerable children and their families in New Jersey. I have worked for the Department of Children and Families for the past 18 years, ten of which were spent working with teens aging out of the foster care system. During that time, I was often involved in advocating for those youth in the education system.

I have a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Delaware. I returned to school as an adult, and obtained a Masters in Child Advocacy from Montclair State University. This program focuses on policy and practice issues relevant to vulnerable children and families, teaching a multidisciplinary understanding of the role of a child advocate as seen through the disciplines of law, social work, and psychology.

I have had a large amount of professional training encompassing many relevant subjects including: child development, Americans with Disabilities Act, special education, cultural competency and bullying.

I have fundraised and fostered for St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center. I fundraised and ran in their annual 5k for 12 years and fostered through their program for victims of Hurricane Sandy, as well as their Safe Haven program which provides temporary foster care for victims of domestic violence.

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### **Why are you running for the Board of Education?**

I am passionate about public education. I was born and raised in NJ and know how great NJ schools are, and can be. I would love to help work towards making Roxbury schools the best they can be while representing all students. My son is in kindergarten and I have a vested interest in the school district. I also appreciate that for all residents (both those with or without children in the school district) it is important to be fiscally responsible. My family plans to be here for many years, so I want my son to receive the best education possible. I am an effective communicator, good listener, and quick learner and look forward to being part of a collaborative effort with other board members for the benefit of our schools.

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### **What are the biggest challenges facing schools in Roxbury and how will you address them?**

I think a big challenge for the district is Improving parental dialogue and communication with families. I would work towards solving this by working towards live streaming meetings to have more community awareness and involvement. I would like more parental education sessions where parents would get more information on current topics being discussed or worked on by the board.

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### **Goals you would like to accomplish if elected:**

- Teacher retention - We need to focus on a healthy environment for our teachers. Examples include: teacher recognition events, mentorship programs for new staff, addressing inequalities with salaries, giving teachers opportunities to share ideas in a collaborative environment. We need to get away from the false narrative that teachers are not to be trusted. Trust them and give them space to teach.
- Safety of children - We need to ensure policies in place are being followed and if changes are needed address them. We should not cut corners when it comes to security personnel's salaries. Our children's safety is too essential. Also, wide open doors on Election Days are a gaping hole in our schools' security. The risk is simply too high and it's easily dealt with: close the schools on election days.
- Community involvement and education - We should offer education sessions for the public on board proceedings, policies, regulations, and other subjects of interest to Roxbury parents. Engage with parents in a healthy, democratic way. That starts with making sure everyone is armed with correct knowledge and feels heard. Video livestream all board meetings so all parents that want to engage can engage from the comfort of home. Publish an easy to understand, layman's terms digest of every school board meeting.

*"I feel truly fortunate to have been born, raised, and educated in New Jersey. New Jersey has a great public school system that I feel prepared me for my career and continuing education. I have committed my life and career to advocating for children and families and would be honored to serve on the Board of Education to help make Roxbury the best it can be."*

**Thank you for coming!**

**DON'T FORGET TO**



**Tuesday, November 7, 2023**

***Sponsored by the Lincoln/Roosevelt PTO***

*President: Nichole O'Shea*

*Vice President: Sachiko Brown*

*Treasurer: Kristen Cascio*

*Secretary: Patricia Rivera*