

Background information:

My name is Shawn Colley and I am running for a board of education position with the Forest Hills Public Schools District. I am a husband, father, retail executive, student mentor, and longtime supporter of FHPS.

The reason I am running for school board is to ensure that all decisions made are ones that put the student's interests first, to continue to support the longstanding success and enrichment this district has achieved so far, and work towards focusing on the bright future of the district and community.

My family and I have lived in the Eastern part of the FHPS district for nine years. We relocated from the Chicagoland suburbs when I took a role at Meijer. The longstanding success and enrichment of the students in the district and the outstanding Special Education program is why we chose to call the FHPS community our home.

My son, Joe, is currently in 7th grade at Eastern Middle School and the ASD Program. He previously attended Ada Elementary for Pre-K and Orchard View Elementary. He enjoys watching movies, playing video games, swimming, and building elaborate lego creations.

My wife, Samantha, has been an active community volunteer in the district for many years, ranging from a classroom parent and on the Orchard View PTO board to being a part of the FHPS Parent Advisory Council. She currently is on the Board of Trustees for the FHPS Foundation.

How would you engage and include parents, caregivers, community members, and students in decision-making in your district around things like curriculum, budgeting and district policy?

I would work towards building a healthy relationship based on open communication and collaboration between the district, board, FHPS families, and community members. I would hope to foster a culture where individuals are open to listening what each other has to say in a calm, constructive manner. I welcome a process that would set up community events or workshops, small group or individual meetings where this could happen. If elected, I would also encourage community members to connect with me directly on matters they would like to discuss on a personal level.

What are your thoughts on school discipline and the way it is exercised in your school district? What are your thoughts on restorative practices?

I agree with the board-approved district guidelines on school discipline, including Board Policy 5207- Anti-Bullying Policy and Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy, however I am open to address our current guidelines to make sure they are in line with providing a safe, supportive atmosphere for all students in our FHPS community.

I strongly believe in restorative practices as a way to address discipline without punishment by focusing on building relationships and developing communication skills and the aim to heal harm and resolve conflict. I appreciate the district's past commitment to having staff trained in restorative practices and would urge them to continue to make this a priority until all staff have completed training. I would also like to see more student trainings and again offering parents and families the opportunity to have training as we have done in previous years.

What are your thoughts on how to improve student mental health?

I believe educating a child in a public school should involve fostering the growth of the entire child, not just a focus on their academic learning. Study after study supports that allowing kids to express their mental health needs, and employing dedicated resources to attend to them, improves academic performance among a myriad of other benefits. I believe that there needs to be a multi-faceted approach towards improving student mental health. One would be to make sure the the district has enough training and resources to assist students and families. Another would be to work towards an inclusive, supportive culture within the schools and in the larger community so those that are having struggles will not feel isolated, ashamed, or reluctant to ask for help. Creating a culture of acceptance and awareness around mental and emotional health, and allowing kids to safely engage in these discussions as they grow, is foundational to this goal.

What are your thoughts on ways to improve Black student achievement in your district and in Michigan schools overall?

I believe that in order to improve Black student achievements within the district should start with communication and collaboration with our students and families. Having the ability to voice their unique perspectives and experiences is vital to build mutual trust and respect can dramatically improve student outcomes. I would encourage hiring more BIPOC staff to have better representation in the district. I support the district with continuing to provide education and training to staff and students. I would also encourage research in other ways we can address implicit biases so that we can build trust and community support that benefit Black and minority students.

What are your thoughts on how to ensure that all students and their families, regardless of race, gender identity, sexuality, disability, religion, income status, etc., feel safe and included in your district?

I believe that all students and their families should feel safe, accepted, and included within the FHPS community. We need to continue working towards creating a welcoming environment that celebrates our unique, diverse community and creating a place where students can be their true, authentic selves without fear of judgment. We need to promote respect, responsibility, and accountability while communicating these expectations to students by modeling them consistently. In addition, we need to address disruptive or disrespectful behavior promptly and constructively as well as provide learning opportunities that encourage cooperation, cohesion, and compassion among students and families.

What are your thoughts on how to recruit and retain staff, particularly staff of color, in your district with regard to pay, benefits, and working conditions?

I believe that the district needs to create a diversity recruitment strategy by identifying sourcing channels for diverse candidates, implementing screening practices to reduce bias, and create inclusive employer branding.

The district should first always look for staff that are in line with our mission, vision, and guiding principles. In order to recruit and retain staff, we should provide a supportive working environment by prioritizing teachers' well-being and professional development to create a sense of belonging and commitment as well as offering competitive compensation and benefits.