

Park Ridge School District 207 Board Candidate Responses

Briefly describe any environmental accomplishments or projects with which you have been involved, either professionally or personally

Carla Owen, candidate for District 207 Board

During my years on the District 207 Board, I have tried to facilitate District responses to community concerns about the environment. This led to discussions at the District to consider the use of more environmentally friendly lawn care throughout the District, which did result in the District contracting for more environmentally beneficial lawn care and weed control. I also chaired a Board committee that proposed that the District look into adopting a sustainability policy. Our committee reviewed environmental policies from other school districts around the country and drafted a policy to recommend to the full Board. The full Board reviewed and discussed that Sustainability Policy and it was adopted unanimously in July, 2020.

Linda Coyle, candidate for District 207 Board

As a member of the District 207 Board Policy Committee, I was involved in the drafting of the final version of The Sustainable Environmental Schools Policy adopted by District 207. Getting this Policy adopted was a priority for me and the Committee. Enacting this Policy allows processes to be put in place to formally bring in environmentally friendly and sustainable choices into District 207 projects. Further, having a formal policy paves the way for establishing a District-wide culture of sustainability. I serve as Chair of the Board of Education's Finance Committee as well. As part of the Committee, we review various bids for goods and services. It is the goal of the Finance Committee, as well as my goal personally, to purchase and use environmentally preferable products and services whenever feasible. For example, we recently approved the purchase of graduation gowns made from recycled materials. These gowns were slightly more pricey than non-recyclable gowns, but the sustainability benefits outweighed the slight increase in cost. We are looking to move to reusable graduation gowns for future years as well.

Ashley Kilburg, candidate for District 207 Board

I feel strongly that the earth should be cared for. I have been a huge fan of David Attenborough and his work for the past 15 years. To that point, I have always tried to conserve resources in our house. I never throw anything away that can be recycled or reused. I keep piles in our garage of items that need to be donated or taken to the appropriate recycling center. For example: books to Bernie's Book Bank, clothes to Salvation Army and Glass Slipper Project, home goods and materials to Habitat for Humanity. We teach our children to turn the lights off when they leave a room, and to

take short showers. We always walk or ride a bike if possible and have been trying to eat a mostly vegetarian diet.

Jin Lee, candidate for District 207 Board

During my two-terms as serving on the school board, I have had the opportunity to be a part of creating a more sustainable environment for the district. We have reduced consumption of disposable materials by composting and reusing materials and using electronic devices when feasible. We continue to work hard to purchase and use environmentally preferable products and services whenever practical. We have been providing fresher, less processed food in the district.

Personally, I always try to think and recommend environmental friendly supplies and materials to be used for schools in the district through various construction contractors. At home and at work, I respectively follow through city regulations of the recycling program.

Aurora Austriaco, candidate for District 207 Board

On a personal level, we use the blue recycle bin at home; we purchase recycled paper towel; we use environmentally preferable products including plant based soap and cleaning products for everyday use; we try to conserve water and energy by minimizing usage; we've purchased electric cars, to name a few. A few months ago, District 207 Board decided to order Sustainable Keeper Gowns for its graduates. The Sustainable Keeper Gowns are made from recycled water bottles or wood fiber sourced exclusively from renewable managed forest and can bio-degrade over time. This purchase is consistent with the District 207 Sustainability Environmental Policy.

District 207 adopted a Sustainable Environmental Schools Policy in the Summer of 2020. Describe what you'd consider your top three priorities from the strategies listed in this policy and if you are willing to support funding for these efforts.

Carla Owen, candidate for District 207 Board

All those Strategies are important and I would be willing to consider funding any of them if they were recommended following the policy procedures. I'm sure I could come up with my personal "top three" from that list, but the policy is meant to support the sustainability strategies that students decide are important. The Strategies listed are examples of possible projects that the Green Teams might consider. Other projects could also be proposed.

I think the most important part of the Policy is that it allows for students to be the driving force behind sustainability efforts. The Green Teams are to be made up of students and others (teachers, parents, representatives of community organizations, for example) who can help guide the students as they figure out the best way to move their priorities from idea to action. The Board believed that students needed to be the engine that drives the sustainability policy, because without student interest and commitment, the policy would not be as effective. Many students are concerned about the environment and the Board believed that they should have the biggest say in what happens since it is their future that is most acutely impacted. At the same time, the Board felt that having other adults on the Green Teams to help guide and support them was important.

Cost of course must be considered in evaluating any proposal. The District has budgets and many competing priorities. The Superintendent and his staff will evaluate the short and long-term costs and benefits of any proposals before deciding whether it can move forward as planned. If the Board is asked to approve funding for an initiative, I would take all those factors into account. That being said, I believe it's important not to be short-sighted about environmental issues which are a serious threat to our future if not addressed now.

Linda Coyle, candidate for District 207 Board

In my view, the top priority needs to be committing to a "Green Team" at each High School. Further, each "Green Team" must ensure that the students play a major role. A big reason we adopted the Sustainable Environmental Schools Policy is to promote the development of strategies to improve the environmental impact of various operations at each school, and student input is an essential part of that. Going hand-in-hand with prioritizing a "Green Team" is providing instruction to students on the importance of the environment, and involving students in the implementation of green school activities. Students spend the majority of their days in school, right now virtually but also, and ultimately, mostly physically present. It's so important for Maine East, West and South to be a place of inspiration and a place where the kids develop a sense of awareness and responsibility. Finally, from a broad District point of view, a priority always needs to be focusing, when feasible, on green building standards, sustainability, and student health in construction and modernization projects. With regard to funding, of course I greatly support these initiatives.

Ashley Kilburg, candidate for District 207 Board

My top three priorities from the strategies listed in the Sustainable Environmental Schools Policy are:

- 1. Providing fresher, less processed food in the district's food service program. Students deserve this, and so does our earth.*
- 2. Reducing energy and water consumption at all three D207 schools. My hope is that the new construction projects will implement energy saving technology throughout our three high schools.*
- 3. Establishing recycling programs and standards in district facilities. I believe D207 students would be willing participants in recycling programs at their schools if the programs are accessible and the students are educated on the importance of such issues.*

Jin Lee, candidate for District 207 Board

My top three priorities are

- 1. Having the district continue to work hard to promote practices to conserve natural resources and protect the health of the community. There's always room for improvement and conversations around strategies to create a more sustainable environmental school.*
- 2. Selecting and prioritizing strategic implementation - considering initial cost, long-term potential cost or cost savings, quality and performances of product or service, health impacts, and environmental considerations*
- 3. Focusing on green building standards, sustainability, and student health in facilities construction and modernization projects*

I think the Green Team is very important, which is made up of district students, staff and administrators: representatives of community organizations; health professionals to assess current district operations. We also use green cleaning products, clean energy technologies, establishing recycling programs and we've eliminated the use of pesticides like Roundup that have been shown to be harmful to the environment and humans.

Aurora Austriaco, candidate for District 207 Board

The Board is proud that District 207 adopted the Sustainable Environmental Policy so that the District can be more environmentally accountable. The Policy listed several strategies for implementation and each strategy is as important as the next one. As such, it would be difficult to choose my top three priorities but rest assured that each will be given its due priority. Since District 207 adopted the Policy, it will be committed to supporting the Policy.

The world and our communities are experiencing critical issues such as access to freshwater, climate change, land use issues, intense storms and stormwater

management issues. These topics are not usually discussed in biology, chemistry and physics classes which are core science classes. How can we make sure all students are learning about these issues?

Carla Owen, candidate for District 207 Board

I think that many of these topics are being covered in core classes, although not in a specific required unit. Would it be a good idea to require such a unit? Maybe, but I think that would fall far short of the more broad way that students need to learn about the impact of a variety of human actions and inactions on the environment and on society as a whole. I think a more effective way to educate our students about these issues is through discussions in many different classes, and I suspect that many teachers are already doing so because this issue is so prevalent in society and on the minds of so many of our students. The District offers elective classes (including environmental science, human geography, geology) and clubs that address environmental issues in some depth. The District has now adopted a Sustainability Policy that commits the District to “enhance a District-wide culture of sustainability” and provides a framework for students to work on initiatives to help the environment.

I don't think there is any one way to make sure that students are learning about these issues. The best approach would be multi-faceted, and include cooperation between the schools and public groups committed to the subject—like Go Green Park Ridge— which is something that our Sustainability Policy anticipates and encourages.

Linda Coyle, candidate for District 207 Board

Getting the kids involved and conscious of the importance of sustainable options, and embracing environmentally friendly choices from the moment they walk in the door of their school sets the stage for a life of continued awareness of the precious nature of our environment. A big part of that is having a curriculum that incorporates those issues, including climate change, land use issues, stormwater management issues, etc. A good step might be to develop a "Best Practices" for environmental teaching and learning to be applied across the board at all three schools. Ingraining thoughtfulness about environmental issues in all aspects of teaching should be a priority. Understanding the complexity of environmental issues and our natural world is not something that should or even can be taught in one class, but instead involves continuous awareness and learning. Environmental education at District 207 schools should include the goal of providing each student with opportunities to acquire the knowledge about the issues, attitudes, concerns, obstacles and alternative solutions needed to protect and improve the environment.

Ashley Kilburg, candidate for District 207 Board

Current environmental issues are important subjects to be discussed across multiple departments. For sure it is applicable to discuss these problems in science classes, but I also believe these topics can be useful in social studies classes to understand human migration over time and what is currently happening in some parts of the world as ocean levels rise. Educating D207 students about current issues affecting our world helps them to become critical thinkers and responsible global citizens as they move through their lives.

Jin Lee, candidate for District 207 Board

We do have these topics diversified throughout the curriculum, but we also think the development of the "Green-Teams" in each building will help encourage a broader discussion and exploration of the topics.

Another way we can make sure all students are learning about these issues is to create (and some schools may already have done so) student-led clubs and/or organization to encourage conversations among our students and create an action plan around what the students feel is the most important need for their school when it comes to creating a sustainable environment.

Aurora Austriaco, candidate for District 207 Board

With the District's adoption of the Environmentally Sustainable Policy and its designation of one or more "Green Teams" to assess current district operations and recommend, develop and implement strategies to improve the environmental impact of district operations, such action will ensure that all parties involved will continue to have experiential learning. The Green Teams are made up of district students, staff and administrators; representatives of community organizations; health professionals; and/or others and the interaction amongst these individuals, particularly the students will hopefully add to their learning process.

It is also important to provide forums or access to speakers where students can learn more and discuss critical issues such as access to freshwater, climate change, land use issues, intense storms and stormwater management. These speakers can include experts in these fields who deal with these issues on a daily basis including representatives from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, Planning and Zoning Department, or the EPA, to name a few.

In addition, the Sustainability Plan is a fairly new one and the District can continue to improve its environmental accountability and understanding of these issues as they move forward in the implementation of the strategies identified in the Plan.