



UPPER ARLINGTON
PROGRESSIVE ACTION

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2025 Screening Questions for School Board Candidates

Please return to: cherylrgrossman@gmail.com by 9/15/25

Candidate Name: Nidhi Satiani

Phone:

PLEASE NOTE, *the views in this email are my own. They are not originating from Upper Arlington City Schools nor are they official speech of the district.*

1. Why are you running for school board, what are your qualifications for this position, and what are your top priorities/interests?

I am running for re-election to continue championing thoughtful, effective governance that ensures every student is supported academically and is prepared to flourish. My core philosophy is simple: embrace action. Our solutions will never be perfect, but they can always improve, and we can always take steps forward. I am driven by the belief that true progress comes from building strong networks and regularly reviewing our practices to ensure they remain the best way to meet the needs of our students and community today.

I am an incumbent on the Upper Arlington School Board, and I bring over 30 years of experience on elected and appointed boards and councils. I previously had a fulfilling 20-year career as an optometrist that included patient-care, research, and innovation via business start-ups. I am currently pursuing a doctorate in public policy and management, having already earned a Master's in Public Health and a Certificate in Education Finance from Georgetown University.

My top priorities and interests center on preparing students for a complex future through holistic education, ensuring effective and representative governance, and preserving public education. I aim to educate "thinkers and doers" by enhancing academics with a focus on real-world problem-solving, transferable skills, and integrated mental health supports. Key initiatives I will continue to champion include the phased implementation of our new student voice policy, strengthening history and civics education through inquiry-based frameworks, and evolving service learning to focus on the root causes of social challenges.

As a leader, I am committed to transparent, student-centered budgeting and building a collaborative culture that engages the entire community. I see public education and democracy as being under attack and believe in proactively building networks with legislators and advocacy groups to protect public schools from threats like uncapped vouchers. My ultimate goal is to create an environment where a person's identity is not a predictor of their success and every student can flourish.

2. Are you seeking other endorsements? Why or why not? Have you received any endorsements yet?

Yes, I am seeking other endorsements. I am seeking endorsements from organizations that align with my values, which I believe are represented by groups like the Matriots and Moms Demand Action. Endorsements are a way to show pride in my values and clarify where I stand for those who cannot invest additional time in getting to know the candidates. I have already received endorsement from the Franklin County Democratic Party and 314 Action Fund, an organization that supports scientists seeking elected office. When/if the window

to apply opens, I intend to seek endorsement from the local Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE), and the local Ohio Education Association (UAEA).

3. How are you focusing your campaign to persuade residents to vote for you over other candidates?

My campaign is focused on persuading residents by highlighting my unique qualifications and a proven record of thoughtful, competent governance. What truly distinguishes me is my proactive approach to problem-solving. As a scientist, I use evidence to ask important questions that move us forward and collaborate to find the most impactful solutions for our schools. My campaign is a reflection of that.

Through canvassing, house parties, public events, private events, and social media, my team and I are demonstrating my commitment to continuous improvement, my record of championing effective governance, and my tenacity in problem-solving. This is how I will renew the trust and support of our residents.

4. How much financial support have you received for your campaign? Are you on track to meet your financial goals?

Our community has been quite generous in its support. The semi-annual report I filed showed \$18,257.55 in total monetary contributions from Jan 1 through June 30 of this year. I am on track to meet my financial goal through a variety of fundraising methods, including endorsements, grassroots events, large donor events, online donation pages, and email campaigns. The office I am seeking has no limits on campaign contributions from individuals.

5. How will you address the different and unique needs of all of the students within our district? How would you encourage an inclusive learning environment in which all students feel equally valued?

To address the unique needs of all students and encourage an inclusive learning environment, my approach is rooted in policy, advocacy, and creating systems where every student feels safe and empowered.

My ultimate goal is for a person's identity not to be predictive of their future success, which involves providing individualized supports. I have demonstrated this commitment in several ways:

- To ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve their full potential, I helped develop a framework for student success, focusing on removing barriers and tailoring support to meet the individual needs of each child. It ensures our curriculum is rich and comprehensive, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within our community so that all students feel a sense of belonging and are prepared for the world beyond our schools. The framework also guides us to use detailed data to identify where students may be struggling, allowing us to direct resources effectively and close gaps. Furthermore, it reinforces our commitment to recruiting and retaining a high-quality, talented staff that brings a wide range of experiences and perspectives to our classrooms, benefiting all students.
- I believe in empowering students to advocate for themselves. I drafted significant sections of the student voice policy to ensure a breadth of student experiences are elevated – not just our incredible athletics programs. I also advocated for a K-12 student leadership curriculum to build skills in leadership and budgeting, which are important for economic independence. Our administration announced the first iteration of this at our September 2025 meeting and I could not be more thrilled!
- I have also advocated for supporting all students who have experiences that feel like bullying, not just those who meet the narrow legal definition. My commitment to safety and inclusion extends to supporting age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education that includes consent, providing

trauma-informed support for staff, and ensuring bathroom policies are as gender-inclusive as legally permissible. Additionally, I proactively build relationships with leaders from groups that are being actively targeted by state and federal mandates to ensure we can continue to support these students in their academic journey.

By focusing on systemic policies, amplifying student voices, and ensuring a safe and respectful school climate, I work to create an inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and have the opportunity to flourish.

6. What is your view of school choice and vouchers in general and the backpack bill in particular?

I initiated a conversation and was integral to the district joining a state-wide lawsuit to stop uncapped vouchers from draining resources from Free Appropriate Public Education for all students. That said, research and conversations with education thought-leaders have confirmed the value of certain types of vouchers like the Jon Peterson scholarship and the pre-expansion EdChoice Program, especially for students with special needs or with less resources.

I believe public schools are the bedrock of our community and the reason a democratic way of life is possible. In this time, when all sources of funding for public schools are being threatened, it is imperative that we explore all options to work collaboratively with other public schools to solidify adequate resources for public education.

7. How would you prefer to receive input from UA residents: public participation during board meetings, emails prior to meetings, or in person meetings with residents?

My commitment is to ensure every voice is heard, which is why I utilize a flexible and multi-faceted approach to community engagement. I value all forms of input, whether it's public participation during board meetings, emails, or personal conversations.

Creating a "collaborative and growth" culture is central to my philosophy. I've actively worked to increase opportunities for community feedback by making board meetings more transparent and reinstating the community finance committee. I also believe in meeting residents where they are, which is why I've enjoyed connecting with many of you through porch chats, backyard gatherings, and community events.

My approach is also about learning and adapting to be as effective as possible. For instance, after experimenting with weekly office hours in my first year, I found that I could be more responsive and connect with a greater number of people through a combination of email and scheduled meetings, either virtual or in-person. This commitment to thoughtful, competent governance means I continuously seek the most accessible and effective avenues for engagement. Ultimately, my collaborative problem solving approach focuses on empathy and shared solutions to ensure we achieve sustainable, positive outcomes for our students and community.

8. What is the board's role versus the administration's role in running our school system?

The school board and the administration have distinct but complementary roles in serving our students and community. The board is the governing body, setting the district's overall direction and ensuring accountability. Our primary responsibilities are to hire and oversee the superintendent and treasurer, establish district policies and long-range goals, and safeguard the fiscal health of our schools. In essence, we are the community's voice, ensuring that our schools reflect our shared values and that tax dollars are spent wisely to achieve our goals.

The administration, led by the superintendent, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the district. They are the experts in educational operations tasked with implementing the policies and goals set by the board.

I have focused on strengthening the board's governance role by leading initiatives in policy review, enhancing our legislative platform, and conducting regular performance reviews of the superintendent and treasurer. This clear division of responsibilities ensures that we have both strong strategic oversight and effective daily management, creating a system of accountability that serves our students, staff, and community.

9. Our five school board members are a team of leaders who are charged with improving our school district. Team members do not always agree on solutions. Can you provide us with an example of a time where you had a conflict with other team members and how the conflict was resolved.

One of the greatest conflicts I've experienced on our board has centered on governance. I joined in 2022, as we emerged from COVID, a time that called for grace for everyone. Still, community concerns were clear: too many decisions seemed to have been made behind closed doors, and no incumbents were re-elected. Rebuilding trust was, and remains, a top priority. Guided by board policy, I began moving items out of consent agendas and ensuring ideas were openly discussed before votes were cast. This was consistent with how our policies said decisions should be made, but it was a departure from how our board had often operated in practice. In my 25 years of leadership roles, I had seen how meetings can either reinforce credibility or undermine it. They are most effective when they serve as a genuine forum for discussion and decision-making, not as a formality that leaves the impression outcomes are choreographed or predetermined.

I first worked to resolve the misalignment and resultant friction with one-on-one conversations. Ultimately, I requested a facilitated team discussion at our retreat. That proved productive. We recognized that while most board members and administrators had worked together for decades, I was newer to the group and brought different life experiences and a different governance lens. I also learned members were less comfortable in policy or advocacy roles. With this new understanding, I adjusted my approach to find alternative ways to ensure transparency and accountability that respected each member's comfort level.

Ultimately, the conflict helped us grow as a board. For me, leadership means creating systems that allow every voice to be heard and valued, and this experience reminded me that how we work together is just as important as the decisions we make. Even when full consensus isn't possible, we can still move forward by recognizing and respecting each person's limits.

10. What do you believe the district's role should be in supporting student mental health and well-being? Are there additional policies or resources you would advocate for to address growing concerns about anxiety, depression, and stress among students?

The district's role in supporting student mental health is foundational; it is just as critical as academic instruction. We cannot educate "thinkers and doers" if students are struggling with anxiety, depression, or stress. I advocate for a comprehensive approach, focusing on both proactive skill-building and responsive, accessible support.

First, we must integrate mental wellness into the fabric of our educational experience. The same critical thinking skills students learn in math and language arts are the building blocks of resilience. I advocate for a more intentional, district-wide approach, including K-12 curricula that innovatively and intuitively build

resilience. For example, there are evidence-based philosophy and civics programs that meet state standards while teaching empathy and ethical reasoning. By embedding these vital life skills into our core work, we empower students to navigate challenges long before they become crises. This also means fostering a culture of safety and support where every student feels seen, which is why I have consistently advocated for supporting all students who have experiences that feel like bullying, not just those who meet a narrow legal definition.

Second, we must have robust support systems in place for students who are struggling now. The unfortunate reality is that affluent suburban school districts often see higher rates of anxiety, depression, stress, and substance use. It is my hope that someday we will find the root causes and effective solutions – this is a core piece of my own doctoral dissertation work. Until then, we must acknowledge that our community is not protected by any sort of bubble. That is why I have been a strong supporter of expanding student access to mental health professionals in all of our school buildings and building strong referral networks. By combining this proactive, skills-based education with accessible, professional care, we create a holistic system of support. This comprehensive approach ensures we are not just reacting to problems, but are actively building a resilient, healthy, and supportive environment where every student can flourish.

11. How would you ensure the district's curriculum reflects the diverse histories, identities, and perspectives of our student body? What is your stance on efforts to limit what teachers can teach about race, gender, and history?

My commitment is to ensure our curriculum serves as both a window and a mirror for every student, reflecting the diverse histories and identities of our community while preparing them for a complex world. Education is the foundation of a prosperous and democratic future, and that begins with students seeing themselves and their peers valued in what they learn.

To that end, I have been a proactive champion for inclusive education. I was integral to the development of a framework for this work. At the same time, I recognize the challenging landscape educators face today. When laws are passed that attempt to limit what can be taught, it is the board's responsibility to provide clarity and steadfast support. As a public school, we will always follow the law, but we have no obligation to proactively discriminate beyond its requirements. Our teachers deserve to feel empowered to challenge and support every student. Drawing from my own graduate training on the nuances of academic freedom and first amendment rights, I am dedicated to ensuring our board gives educators the clear answers and backing they need to create dynamic, inclusive, and legally-sound learning environments where every student can flourish.

12. How would you ensure the district's budget reflects the community's values, including transparency, equity, and support for academic excellence? What strategies would you use to maintain public trust around financial decision-making?

Maintaining the public's trust in our district's financial decision-making is one of my highest priorities, and it starts with a foundation of expertise, transparency, and a commitment to our community's values.

To ensure I bring evidence-based practices to our financial oversight, I completed a Certificate in Education Finance from Georgetown University and am currently studying public economics and budgeting as part of my doctoral work. This expertise allows me to not only understand the complexities of school finance but also to proactively seek innovative funding sources that lessen the reliance on local tax dollars. I have used this knowledge to help the board strengthen its fiscal oversight, including conducting regular reviews of the treasurer.

But expertise is not enough; transparency is key to building trust. I was a strong advocate for bringing back our community finance committee, a group of residents with financial and business expertise who meet regularly

with our treasurer. This committee provides an invaluable layer of community oversight and ensures we are proactive in maintaining our district's long-term financial health. To further enhance transparency, I am proud of the new efficiency commitment page on our district's website, which clearly showcases the concrete steps our district has taken over the years to reduce costs and be responsible stewards of taxpayer money.

Our commitment to fiscal responsibility is reflected in our results. The district consistently maintains a AAA Bond Rating from S&P Global and earns a clean audit opinion and the Auditor of State Award. These accolades are a testament to our dedication to effective, accountable, and transparent financial practices that align with our community's values and directly support our mission of academic excellence for every student.

13. What are your views on Ohio's expanding EdChoice voucher program and its effect on public school funding? Do you believe it aligns with the Ohio Constitution? If so, how should taxpayer funding be distributed between public and private schools?

I believe a strong public education system is the foundation of our democracy and a core constitutional responsibility of the state. From that perspective, Ohio's uncapped EdChoice voucher program is a significant threat to our public schools and the nearly 90% of Ohio children they serve.

In my view, the program is fiscally irresponsible and does not align with the Ohio Constitution. It makes little sense to divert over a billion dollars in public tax money to private and religious schools, many of which have selective admissions policies, while the state's own bipartisan Fair School Funding Formula is still not fully funded. The constitution calls for a "thorough and efficient system of common schools," and the current voucher system directly undermines that mandate by draining essential resources from the schools that are open to all students.

Believing that action is essential, I was integral in the decision for our district to join the statewide lawsuit to stop this uncapped voucher program. This is not just a fiscal issue; it is a fight to uphold the promise of a Free Appropriate Public Education for every child in Ohio. My focus will remain on advocating for the full funding of our public schools and ensuring we have the resources needed to provide an excellent education for every student.

If taxpayer dollars are to be directed to private institutions, whether through tax breaks like nonprofit status or direct funding such as vouchers, there must be a clear and significant community benefit. In Ohio, for example, hospitals with tax-exempt status must file a Form 990 and a Schedule H, which detail their compliance and community contributions. While not perfect, this system provides far more transparency than the Schedule E filed by private schools, which only affirms they operate for educational purposes. Any private school receiving public funds, whether through exemptions or vouchers, should be held to the same admission, curricular, and transparency standards as public schools.

14. In your view, how much religious instruction should be allowed during regular public school hours? Please explain your views on when and where religious education should take place.

In my view, the role of a public school is to provide a secular education that equips every student with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive. Therefore, religious instruction should not be part of the regular school day.

This position is not a judgment on the value of religious education, but a clear definition of our responsibility as a public school system. To me, our community-developed strategic plan prepares students to be "thinkers and doers" who are ready to launch into the world. We achieve this by focusing on a curriculum that improves

student engagement, empowers them to solve real-world challenges, and provides a rich, holistic experience through programs in the arts, technology, and service learning. We are dedicated to building universal skills like empathy and critical thinking, which are essential for solving universal problems like poverty and injustice.

While we are guided by our strategic plan, we will always follow the law. State law currently mandates that we release students for religious instruction if requested. We comply with this mandate. And, as a board member, I believe our focus and resources must remain dedicated to our core educational mission. Therefore, I will not support any proactive expansion of religious programs beyond what is legally required, ensuring we stay true to the strategic goals our community has set for our students.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views, accomplishments, and plans.