Meet The Candidates

www.hhh.k12.ny.us

May 2026

Dear Community Members,

The following biographical information, as submitted directly from candidates for the Board of Education Trustee election on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, is being presented to the residents of the Half Hollow Hills Central School District as a community service. The purpose of this publication is to provide background information on the candidates so residents may make informed decisions in the election.

Each candidate has been allowed equal space, with the option of including a picture; the material has been printed exactly as provided by the candidate. The biographies are placed in the order in which they will appear on the ballot. The order has been determined by lottery.

Candidates will be seeking four Board Trustee positions*. These positions are presently held by incumbents Diana Acampora, Dr. John Mathew, Dr. Leonard Patella and Michael Prywes. The candidates for the Board of Education Trustee election are Michael Prywes (incumbent), Dr. Leonard Patella (incumbent), Colin Specter, Dina Shulman, Diana Acampora (incumbent), Sally Hassanein, Mario Chery and Dr. John Mathew (incumbent).

** In October of 2025, Dr. Leonard Patella was appointed to fill the vacancy created by then-Board Trustee Adam Kleinberg's resignation from his term ending June 2027. This was done in accordance with Board of Education Policy 2150, giving the Board the authority to fill any vacancy by a majority vote. As such, there will be four vacancies for election: one to fill the unexpired term until June 2027 and three full three-year terms expiring June 2029. Since the district uses "at large" seats, the three candidates with the highest number of votes will fill the three-year terms and the candidate with the fourth highest number will fill the unexpired term ending June 2027.*

SCHOOL BUDGET VOTE AND TRUSTEE ELECTION

TUESDAY
MAY 19, 2026

7 AM - 10 PM

HIGH SCHOOL EAST GYMNASIUM

The Half Hollow Hills Board of Education
Mrs. Diana Acampora, President
Ms. Stephanie Gurin, Vice President
Mrs. Nadia Bilal
Dr. Leonard Patella
Dr. John Mathew
Mr. Michael Prywes
Mrs. Donna Smawley

In compliance with Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, election information is offered in English and Spanish.

Half Hollow Hills
Central School District
525 Half Hollow Road
Dix Hills, NY 11746

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Board of Education
Mrs. Diana Acampora, President
Ms. Stephanie Gurin, Vice President
Mrs. Nadia Bilal
Dr. John Mathew
Dr. Leonard Patella
Mr. Michael Prywes
Mrs. Donna Smawley

Superintendent of Schools
Mr. John O'Farrell

I'm Michael Prywes, and I'm running for re-election to the Half Hollow Hills Board of Education.

My family moved to Dix Hills in 1984, and for more than 40 years, Half Hollow Hills has been our home. I grew up here—Vanderbilt, Burr's Lane, and Hills East—and my wife Devra and I have raised our two sons here as well. This district has shaped our family in so many ways, and serving on the Board has been one important way for me to give back to a community that has given so much.

One thing I've learned is that no one comes into this role as a "perfectly qualified" Trustee. Board service isn't about having the loudest voice or the best catchphrase. It's about character, judgment, and a willingness to serve the entire community.

For me, that comes down to **5 Cs**:

Commitment — showing up, doing the work, and following through.

Collaboration — remembering that a Trustee is one of seven, and listening matters!

Compassion — keeping students, families, faculty, and staff at the center of every decision.

Curiosity — asking questions, digging deeper, and staying open-minded.

Courage — making thoughtful decisions with integrity, even when it's not easy.

Professionally, I'm an attorney, producer, author, and adjunct law professor at Touro and Hofstra. But more importantly, I'm a member of this community who cares deeply about its future.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to continue serving Half Hollow Hills for another three years. Please remember to vote on Tuesday, May **19!**



Thank you for your consideration.

Best wishes for a wonderful rest of your school year!

-Michael Prywes

Spring 2026

RE-ELECT
Dr. Leonard Patella
For Half Hollow Hills School Board Trustee

★ Fiscally Responsible ★Forward Thinking ★Fresh Perspective



ABOUT ME:

I have proudly called this community home since 2011. My wife, Meredith, and I have been married for 18 years, and our son, Charlie, is currently a junior at High School West. From the moment Charlie entered kindergarten, I became deeply involved in the PTA, and over the past twelve years I have dedicated myself to serving our schools in a variety of leadership roles. To that end, I have had the privilege of serving as Co-President of Otsego Elementary School PTA, President of the PTA Council, Co-President of the High School West PTSA, and Chair of numerous district-wide committees. These experiences have allowed me to work collaboratively with parents, educators, and administrators to support and strengthen our school community.

In 2020, I volunteered to travel to Albany to advocate on behalf of our district, initially serving as a parent liaison. That experience was both meaningful and motivating, inspiring me to deepen my involvement. I later co-chaired the Legislative Committee for two years, where I helped expand educational opportunities for students and led a highly successful second advocacy trip to Albany.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, I sought to bring our community together in a time of uncertainty. I invited parents to submit short videos of their children sharing messages of appreciation for their teachers. I received ninety videos and compiled them into a film that was shared with faculty at Otsego, helping to lift spirits during a challenging time.

In 2024, I was honored to receive the New York State PTA *Advocate in Action Award* at PTA Council's Founders' Day, a recognition that reflects my ongoing commitment to advocacy and service.

CAREER:

Professionally, I am a general dentist in Garden City and serve as the Vice Chair of Dental Medicine at Northwell Health. For many years, I have trained hundreds of dental residents to become clinicians equipped with the skills to provide comprehensive care, who have gone on to successful careers. Many reach out years later to express their gratitude. I am also proud to serve as the team dentist for the New York Islanders. For more than 25 years, I have been a member of the Medical Board at Glen Cove Hospital, where I have helped oversee physician hiring, quality of care, patient safety, and adherence to evidence-based clinical standards. This experience has strengthened my understanding of governance and accountability—skills that directly support my work as a board trustee.

GOALS:

I will strive to build strong partnerships with families and the community to support every learner. I am dedicated to fiscal responsibility and transparency, using resources wisely and communicating budget decisions openly. I will prioritize safe, inclusive, and engaging school environments where all students feel valued and inspired to grow.

I would be grateful for your vote and your support so that I may continue serving our community with strong leadership, accountability, and a clear vision for our district.

Email: leonard.patella@icloud.com



ELECT

Colin Specter

For Half Hollow Hills Board of Education

4x PARENT · OPERATOR · FISCAL STEWARD · EDUCATION-FOCUSED

Hi my name is Colin Specter. I'm a proud GirlDad to four Half Hollow Hills girls: Luna, Jade, Sabina and Willow and devoted husband to Robyn.

I am very excited to contribute to this incredible community as I ask for your vote to represent you on the Board of Education.

By day I'm a sales leader in the tech and manufacturing space, but my true passion is in cultivating safe, welcoming and prosperous communities.

I'm a product of public schools, wood shop and varsity sports (Champion Pole Vaulter) where I learned early that having a safe, supportive environment with the best teachers, caring coaches, top facilities and staff are key to creating a learning experience where our kids can thrive.

I want to make sure Half Hollow Hills stays one of the best districts in New York and the nation!

Our community is strong and thriving. My goal is to protect and preserve this safe, loving and enriching district for many years to come as we raise our children here.

I represent the perspective of parents whose children are at the very start of their K–12 journey.

WHAT I'LL FOCUS ON

Academic excellence
Keep HHH among the top-ranked districts on Long Island and expand opportunity for every student.

The whole student
Protect and invest in athletics, music, arts, and hands-on learning like shop and CTE — so every kid can find their thing.

Fiscal responsibility
Apply the same budget discipline I use running a business to every taxpayer dollar the district spends.

Support for teachers and staff
Attract, support, and retain the excellent teachers and staff who make HHH work. They're the single biggest driver of student outcomes.

Safe and secure schools
Every child deserves a school that's physically secure and emotionally safe. I'll prioritize modern safety infrastructure, threat prevention, and swift response to bullying and harassment.

Responsible growth
Require impact studies on new development and make sure the cost of growth doesn't fall on existing taxpayers.

Please vote on Election Day

colinspecter4boe@gmail.com

DINA SHULMAN



Candidate for Half Hollow Hills Board of Education

EXPERIENCE, PASSION, AND BALANCE
FOCUSED ON OUR COMMUNITY'S FUTURE

I am Dina Shulman and I have been a proud Half Hollow Hills resident for almost 20 years. My husband Lawrence and I have three sons, Daniel, Jared, and Ryan. We could not be prouder of the education and opportunity they have received through our district.

I am a dedicated and experienced education advocate with 19 years of service in numerous PTA leadership roles across the Half Hollow Hills Schools. As an elementary school teacher, reading specialist, and parent of three sons who have all matriculated through this district, I bring both professional expertise and a deep personal investment in our schools. Recognized for being hardworking, passionate, detail-oriented, and fair-minded, I am committed to fostering collaboration, transparency, and excellence in education. I am eager to contribute my experience, perspective, and energy to the Board of Education to support student success and strengthen our community.

Why I'm Qualified:

- PTA Council Vice President
- PTA Council Treasurer
- PTA Council Recording Secretary
- PTA Council Corresponding Secretary
- PTA Council Legislative Committee Chairperson
- PTA Council Education Committee Chairperson
- Masters, Reading/Literacy – Hofstra University
- Elementary Teacher – Lindenhurst Schools
- Steering Committee Member – Temple Beth Torah
- Treasurer/Lead Admin – HSE Baseball Booster Club

Visions and Goals If Elected:

- Support student growth, academically, socially, and emotionally while continuing to ensure high standards
- Foster a district where families, teachers and administrators work together with open communication and respect
- Ensure students graduate prepared for college and careers by expanding real world learning, technology, and career pathways
- Maintain schools where every student feels safe, respected, and supported regardless of background or ability
- Promote trust through clear communication, balanced decision-making, and fiscally responsible use of taxpayer money

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-19 YEARS OF SERVICE-

-BALANCED PERSPECTIVE-

-DEVOTED EDUCATOR-

-PROUD PARENT-

FOR MORE INFORMATION

dina.shulman@yahoo.com

RE-ELECT TO THE HALF HOLLOW HILLS SCHOOL BOARD



DIANA ACAMPORA

Half Hollow Hills didn't become a nationally recognized school district overnight or by accident. It happened through years of thoughtful goals, steady leadership, and good decisions. That success starts early. Our elementary schools build a strong academic and social foundation that carries students forward confidently. By the time they reach our middle and high schools, that foundation shows. Our students consistently earn top honors in competitive programs like the Regeneron Science Talent Search, the National Merit Scholarship Program, and national arts and music competitions, reflecting both achievement and opportunity across disciplines. Today's school environment is more complicated than ever. It takes dedication and experience to navigate the issues facing our students, faculty, and administration, along with the fiscal responsibility required to maintain an elite district. It means knowing what's worked, what hasn't, and what needs to come next – and staying deeply connected to our proudly diverse community. In my 15 years on the Board, I've been part of the tough decisions that shaped and strengthened this district. Standing still isn't an option. We need to keep advancing academically, in supporting our students, and in keeping our schools safe. That's what steady, informed leadership delivers, and that's what I will continue to provide. I remain committed to providing all students with the opportunity to excel in academics, athletics, and the arts.

Board Service and Awards

- Board of Education Trustee since 2011
- BOE President – 2023 to present
- BOE Vice President – 2020 to 2023
- 2025 Nassau Suffolk School Board Ass'n "Outstanding School Board Service Award"
- 2024 NYS School Board Association "Board Lifetime Achievement Award"
- Former Chairperson - Board Audit, Education, Transportation, Health and Safety, and Facilities Committees
- Member of Closing the Achievement Gap Committee
- Member of Districtwide School Safety Team
- Developed the Transportation Manual

Personal

District resident for over 36 years
Married 38 years

Two High School West Graduates
2014 Villanova University
2017 Bentley University

St. John's University, B.A. Speech Pathology/Audiology

Queens College, Master's Program Speech Pathology

Founder/President – Acampora Concussion Awareness Foundation

Recent District Highlights

- Northwell Mental Health Clinic Affiliation
- Social and emotional learning for students and mental health initiatives including the Hills Academy and Elementary Connects
- Visitor management systems and vestibules in all buildings and Violence Prevention Training for faculty
- Increased AED visibility in buildings and offer volunteer Narcan training to faculty and staff
- Cooperative security drills with police and fire department
- Instituted "Supt's On" – a community forum with the Superintendent of Schools
- Air-conditioned classrooms in every school
- Updated athletic fields and tracks including onsite restroom and concession stand
- Full day Universal Pre-K
- Member of Cooperative Bid Programs
- AP Capstone Program for High Schools
- Seal of Civic Readiness Program
- Continuing Education offerings for senior citizens
- Districtwide Maker Space and STEM initiatives including engineering and robotics clubs
- Encourage students to enter education and STEM careers
- Science research experiences for Middle School students



ELECT

SALLY HASSANEIN

FOR HALF HOLLOW HILLS BOARD OF EDUCATION TRUSTEE

A MOTHER. A LEADER. A COMMUNITY BUILDER.

SERVICE ❁ INTEGRITY ❁ COMMUNITY ❁ EXCELLENCE

ABOUT ME

I have been a proud member of the Half Hollow Hills community since 2014. My husband, Waiel, and I have raised our three sons here. Yousef and Amir graduated from High School East and are now studying civil and mechanical engineering at Virginia Tech. Our youngest, Noah, is a freshman at East. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities HHH has given my family, and I am committed to ensuring every child — and every new parent — feels supported, welcomed, and informed.

WHY I'M RUNNING

I believe in strong, high-performing schools, transparent decision-making, and a collaborative partnership between families, educators, and the broader community. As a parent, volunteer, and community leader, I am committed to ensuring every student has access to a safe, inclusive, and academically rigorous environment, and that every parent has the tools they need to navigate the district with confidence.

WHAT I WANT FOR OUR SCHOOLS

- Strong academics and expanded opportunities for every student
- Safe, supportive, welcoming school environments
- Clear communication and collaborative decision-making
- A district where every family feels seen, heard, and included

MY SERVICE TO HHH

I have been one of HHH's most dedicated and dependable parent volunteers.

- **Class parent** (2014—2022)
- **PTA volunteer**: book fairs, holiday events, field days
- **Chair**, Multicultural Day at Sunquam Elementary
- **Supporter** of HHH athletics and the Football Booster Club
- **Volunteer**, Team Suffolk Swim Club at the HHH Natatorium
- **PTA Liaison**, Facilities Committee and Transportation Committee
- **Regular attendee** of Board of Education meetings and Superintendent forums

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

I bring extensive experience in governance, educational leadership, and community building.

- Executive Vice President and Board Trustee, ICM
- Sunday School Director (12 years) — overseeing 200+ students and staff
- Helped build ICM's summer camp, Mommy & Me, and toddler programs
- Co-organizer, Helping Hands interfaith youth program
- Member, Huntington Anti-Bias Task Force
- Past member, Sisterhood of Salaam-Shalom

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 25+ years of public service at the U.S. Department of Justice
- Supervisory Paralegal, leading a team of 21 professionals
- Supports complex civil and criminal matters, including financial crimes
- Recognized with multiple awards from the Department of Justice and FBI
- Known for diligence, integrity, and managing high-stakes operations

EDUCATION & SKILLS

Education

- B.S., Business Management, Hofstra University
- Certificate in Paralegal Studies, Hofstra University

Skills

- Organizational leadership
- Team management
- Cross-cultural communication
- Program development
- Cross-functional coordination
- Program budgeting

"I'm running to strengthen our community, support our schools, empower our families, and ensure that every child's voice is heard and lifted." ***— Sally Hassanein***

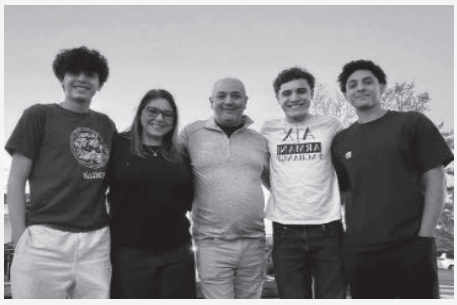
❁ TRUSTED, PROVEN LEADERSHIP ❁

AT A GLANCE

- HHH parent since 2014
- Three sons raised in the District
- 12 years directing ICM Sunday School (200+ students)
- Executive VP, Islamic Center of Melville
- 25+ years at U.S. Dept. of Justice (SDNY)
- Community bridge-builder

COMMITMENT TO HHH

This district has given so much to my family. I am ready to give back with dedication, integrity, and heart — and to work collaboratively so every student in Half Hollow Hills can thrive.



GET INVOLVED

Vote on May 19, 2026

Your voice matters for our schools!

sally4hhhboe@gmail.com

Vote **Mario Chery** HHH Board of Education



Mario Chery is a proud Half Hollow Hills parent, community leader, and advocate for educational excellence. Born in Manhattan to Haitian immigrant parents and the oldest of three children, he learned early the values of hard work, opportunity, and service. He attended Stony Brook University, where he met his beautiful wife, LaWanda; married for 21 years, they have two children in the district—their youngest at West Hollow Middle School and their oldest at High School East.

Mario brings more than 30 years of experience in the technology and production fields, including 25 years in corporate America. He spent 21 years at Goldman Sachs and four years at BNY Mellon, where he served as Senior Vice President of Global Production and Infrastructure. He later founded FreckleTech Productions, expanding his work in live event production, technical direction, and executive operations. His expertise in communication, logistics, and strategic planning informs his thoughtful, solutions-driven approach to leadership.

For over a decade, Mario has been deeply involved in the HHH community. At Paumanok Elementary, he served as Publicity Representative, managing the website and yearbook. At Middle School West, he continued his service as Publicity Representative and Community Awareness Representative, supporting committees, events, and communications.

Mario is also an active member of the Concerned Fathers Association (CFA), where he helps expand mentorship, youth programming, and community engagement, and he serves on the board of Resurrection House, an organization focused on reducing homelessness.

As a candidate for the Half Hollow Hills Board of Education, Mario is committed to:

- Strengthening communication and transparency across the district
- Ensuring safe, supportive learning environments for all students
- Promoting academic excellence and expanding opportunities
- Practicing responsible, community-focused fiscal stewardship

RE-ELECT DR. JOHN MATHEW

HALF HOLLOW HILLS SCHOOL BOARD

★ LEADERSHIP ★ FOCUS ★ INTEGRITY ★ COMMITMENT ★

PERSONAL

- Married 22 years
- Melville resident for 11 years
- 3 children: 2 at High School East and 1 at West Hollow Middle School

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- Medical missions & Set Beautiful Free
- Spartans youth basketball coach
- Suffolk County Marathon medical team
- Hope Day medical team

PROFESSIONAL

- Board Certified Emergency Physician
- Associate Chief Medical Officer, St. Joseph Hospital
- Chairman, Department of Emergency Medicine
- Founding Partner, Progressive Emergency Physicians
- President Elect, Medical Staff, St. Joseph Hospital
- Medical Director, North Amityville Fire Company
- Associate Medical Director, Hicksville Fire Department
- Voting Member, Nassau County REMAC

BOARD SERVICE

- Current Trustee, Half Hollow Hills School District
- Audit / Budget Committee
- Legislative Committee
- Chair, Transportation / Health & Safety Committee
- Previously served on Facilities Committee and Policies Committee

MY COMMITMENT

- Student safety & excellence
- Fiscal responsibility
- Support STEM, Special Education, Athletics & Arts



WHY I SERVE

My family and I chose the Half Hollow Hills School District because we were looking for the best possible education for our children—academically, socially, and through diversity of experience.

I did not run for the Board with a specific agenda—I ran with a simple goal: to support what is best for our children. That includes strong academics, arts, athletics, and safe school environments.

As a physician, I have spent my life caring for people and navigating complex, high-stakes situations. That experience has shaped my leadership approach—thoughtful, balanced, and focused on doing what is right.

Serving on the Board is both a privilege and a responsibility. I believe in this district, our administration, and remain committed to protecting our students while being fiscally responsible.

IMPORTANT VOTER INFORMATION

VOTER REQUIREMENTS

In order to be eligible to vote you must be:

- a citizen of the United States, and
- a resident of the District for at least 30 days prior to the vote, and
- at least 18 years of age, and
- qualified to register or registered to vote in accord with section 5-106 of the Election Law.

Anyone who voted in a school or general election during the four years prior to the pending election need not re-register.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Where: District Clerk's Office at the Fran Greenspan Administration Center
525 Half Hollow Road, Dix Hills 11746

When: Any school day, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Registration is required if you have not voted within four years in a general election or school election. For more information, please contact the District Clerk at (631) 592-3013 or check the Board of Elections website (https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/BOE) to see if you are registered.

The LAST day that a resident may register at the Fran Greenspan Administration Center to vote in this year's Budget Vote and Trustee Election is Thursday, May 14, 2026 before 4:00 p.m.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS & EARLY MAIL BALLOTS

Applications for absentee ballots and early mail ballots for election of school board members and for voting on the school budget are to be completed on a form prescribed by the state board of elections and may be obtained by visiting https://www.hhh.k12.ny.us/budget, or by contacting the District Clerk at 631-592-3013 or fspeciale@hhh.k12.ny.us. Completed applications must be received at least seven days before the election if the ballot is to be mailed to the applicant, or the day before the election if the ballot is to be delivered personally to the applicant or to his or her designated agent. Ballots must be received in the District Clerk's Office no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day of the budget vote and election in order to be canvassed.

The Half Hollow Hills Central School District ("District") publishes this Meet the Candidates Publication ("Booklet") for purely informational purposes only. The Booklet and its content reflect only the information and/or opinion of each respective school board candidate identified herein. By publishing such candidate content, the District does not adopt, verify, sponsor, approve, and/or endorse any candidate content, any school board candidate, and/or any viewpoint expressed in this Booklet.

To the maximum extent permitted by law, the District and its individual staff members shall not be responsible or liable for any claim, loss, or alleged harm arising out of or relating to the Booklet, including any alleged inaccuracy, omission, defamation, and/or misstatement, it being understood that Candidate Content reflects the information and opinions of only the perspective Board Candidate and not the District nor any of its individual staff members.

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