



# SEOPCO CANDIDATE FORUMS

## Village Board, School Districts 97 and 200

Come meet the candidates for local office and ask them questions about their vision and plans. After opening statements, community members will have a chance to talk to each of the candidates and learn about their priorities.

**SEOPCO**  
South East Oak Park Community Organization

[seopco@gmail.com](mailto:seopco@gmail.com)

## Forum Dates

All forums start at 7:00 PM and will be streamed on our Facebook @seopco

School District  
200

February 27

Village Board  
March 19

School District  
97

March 20

## LOCATION

Irving School Auditorium

1125 South Cuyler  
Avenue

# SEOPCO

South East Oak Park Community Organization

*Bringing neighbors together, creating a positive identity for South East Oak Park,  
and empowering residents to act on behalf of our neighborhood*

If you live in South East Oak Park, you already know about the rich diversity, exceptional schools, and beautiful parks that make this a great neighborhood—especially for kids and their families!

SEOPCO works to make sure our wonderful community is represented and remembered in our local government, partnering with the Planning Commission, the police department, the Village Board, and other agencies as Oak Park plans for the future. We also make sure that you are kept up to date on what's happening in our corner of the Village, which consists of the Irving Elementary school area.

Here are just a few of our recent accomplishments:

- 🍌 Our annual BarrieFest, featuring musical entertainment, bounce houses, a climbing wall, a business fair, and local food vendors—more than 400 friends and neighbors joined in the fun!
- 🍌 Collaboration with the Planning Commission's effort to propose plan design guidelines for existing homes and new development in Oak Park, including a tour of South East Oak Park
- 🍌 Working with our Neighborhood Resource Officer, Derrick Verge, as he hosted monthly meetings at Barrie Center
- 🍌 Fundraisers for the Irving Elementary PTO
- 🍌 Monitoring of developments on the Eisenhower Transportation Corridor, with the help of Citizens for Appropriate Transportation

For more information, visit [seopco.org](http://seopco.org) or follow us on Facebook and Twitter! If you have comments or questions, email us at [seopco@gmail.com](mailto:seopco@gmail.com)

## Fred Arkin

Born in Oak Park, raised in River Forest, and a resident of the both villages for the majority of my adult life, I have been blessed by this community and am passionate about rendering service back to it.

My service on the District 200 Board of Education the past 3 ½ years is an outgrowth of a core value that my parents instilled in me and my four siblings. Since the late 1970s, I have been a committed volunteer working with youth and serving on various non-profit boards.

A 1974 graduate of OPRF, I place a very high value on my education growing up, which enabled me to attend the Olin School of Business at Washington University in St. Louis.

I have spent my entire career in the customer service business which has encompassed entrepreneurial and management experience that has significantly informed my school board work.

My volunteer work serving 5- to 18-year-old youths, spanning over four decades, has likewise given me a unique insight as I labor alongside some outstanding educators and administrators. That perspective and experience on the frontlines of youth mentorship provides a solid foundation to make decisions at the board level.

During my tenure on the D200 board, I have:

- Continually advocated for achieving racial equity, including increased minority hiring, implementing restorative practices, increasing enrollment of students of color in honors and AP classes, enhancing curricular offerings to support college/career readiness and examining/eliminating barriers that impede all students from reaching their full potential;
- Supported the hiring of our first African American Superintendent, who is committed to, and a great champion of, the district's focus on racial equity;
- Served as a dutiful steward of district finances, consistently voting against taking full tax levies and supporting over \$32.5 million in tax abatements as prescribed by the Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) in 2013. In addition, I regularly advocate for cost containment by being disciplined in our expenditures and committed to maintaining a balanced budget to avoid placing undue increases on our taxpayers;
- Supported the amendment of policies like our dress code and student identification and other administrative procedures identified as unfair barriers to equity;
- Supported the District's creation of a gender equity policy and implementation of its procedures;
- Worked tirelessly on facilities issues to achieve a community consensus that markedly improves the educational and extra-curricular experience for all students, while accommodating district and taxpayer concerns for the foreseeable future

Before accepting the board's offer to become superintendent, Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams challenged the Board's commitment to racial equity change. She warned the work would be uncomfortable and difficult. I concurred with my colleagues: racial equity had to be at the forefront of our work.

I agree with Dr. Pruitt-Adams that the table is set, and we have reached a pivotal moment at the threshold of making significant progress toward racial equity and narrowing the opportunity gap. These initiatives are paramount for the long-term health of our communities and I am committed the expedient implementation of needed change.

If re-elected, I will continue my passionate advocacy of these initiatives and my dedication to our students, school and community. Our work not only benefits students of color, but all students, families and school staff. Our work is unfinished and we must dedicate ourselves to ensure that these challenges and all other issues facing the Board are addressed in the best interest of our students, taxpayers and staff.

## **Vic Guarino**

I believe that our schools must provide all our students with a strong educational foundation, prepare them to be critical thinkers and to understand our increasingly complex, intertwined, and technological world. We need to ensure that our students are being challenged and have the necessary foundation to succeed in their high school careers and beyond in ways that support their social, emotional and physical health. I'm running because I believe I can bring to the board a wide range of finance and management experience professionally and at the Park District. If elected I will work with other members of the board to end the pool saga, create an actionable plan to address equity that is clearly defined, and identify measurable goals that hold the board and administration accountable for making real progress.

I believe the three main issues facing D200 are equity/achievement, finances, and the facilities.

### **Equity and Achievement**

OPRFHS has been talking about equity and the achievement gap for far too long – its time for action and achieving results. Racial equity is achieved when one's racial identity is not a predictor of academic performance. Equity is needed in order to attack the achievement gap. There is not a single silver bullet that will address the achievement gap and achieve equity at OPRFHS, rather, it requires a change in culture by the entire school community. As a first step I would introduce accountability by having performance measures introduced into senior staff contracts. We can also immediately implement curriculum changes; reintroduce the Scholar Program that supports students taking an Honors/AP course for the first time; reintroduce furniture into the student center and allow students to use it as a safe place after school; reimagine the purpose of summer school as a means to prepare student making the transition to high school and as a boost to prepare student to take honors/AP courses during their time at OPRF; develop close links with the middle schools; an aggressive campaign to hire teachers of color and then provide them the support they need to retain them long term. These are just example of a few steps that can be taken immediately and should be a start of an ongoing process of constant evaluation, change, and improvement.

## **Finances and Facilities**

OPRFHS is also facing key decisions on finances and facilities. As a member of the IMAGINE team I was part of the evaluation of our existing facility. The current board, however, failed to provide leadership during the IMAGINE process and did not define a scope or realistic budget with a goal of creating a plan that meets the educational needs of the school while being fiscally responsible. The tax burden on residents has become onerous and tax increases due to referendum or taking on debt should not be considered. I believe the current excessive fund balance should be partially used to make improvements identified by IMAGINE that update class rooms, lab space, the library, tutoring center, and other improvements directly related to student academic achievement. The remainder of the balance should be used to offset the expected deficit spending over upcoming years. Tough choices will have to be made in the future that balance providing a high-quality education experience to all of our students while operating within these budget constraints.

## **About me**

I am a 1983 OPRFHS graduate with long term ties to the Oak Park & River Forest community. In addition to my 4 siblings, my two daughters and 10 nieces and nephews have or will attend OPRF. My experience as a Project Manager for over 27 years at Argonne National Laboratory gives me the skills to work with diverse interest groups, effectively prioritize and budget for short- and long-term goals, and experience in dealing with uncertain federal funding. I have Masters degrees in mechanical and structural engineering and a PhD in public policy and planning and am a licensed structural engineer. For the last eight years I have served on the Oak Park Park District board and am currently its president. While serving on the Park District Board we have invested over \$60M renovating every park including a major remake of Ridgeland Common and the construction of the Gymnastics Center and Environmental Center. These capital investments were all made without raising taxes or needing to go to referendum. In addition, we've increased the range of programming to appeal to all our residents, increased scholarships from \$8k to \$65k, and partnered with D97, D200 and Fenwick to get access to gym and pool space so that our youth have access to open gyms and programming. In addition, the PD implemented cisterns to capture rain water, installed LED lights and solar panels which resulted in an annual savings of \$180k. Finally, as President of the Park District Board I have led an effort asking all six Oak Park taxing bodies to agree to forgo the TIF roll offs for both Madison and Downtown as well as increased EAV due to new developments. By foregoing the new EAV from new developments and the ending of the TIF residents could see a tax reduction and real benefit.

I will encourage increased communication and cooperation between all feeder schools, all community organizations, all social services agencies, all parent groups, and all student groups that work with the high school and its students. I feel that it is important that the entire community be involved in working to help District 200 face its challenges. I believe I can help OPRFHS meet its current challenges so that we can continue our tradition of academic excellence and graduate the thinkers, leaders, and dreamers of tomorrow.

## **Contact Info**

Vic can be reached at [victor.guarino@att.net](mailto:victor.guarino@att.net) or 708-612-8309

<https://vicguarinod200.com/>

## **Gina Harris**

*Educator, Peacemaker, Architect of Change*

OPRF High School can be our greatest community asset if we fully embrace the values of excellence, equity, unity, and stewardship. As an experienced teacher and trainer of professional educators, a strong equity leader, a restorative justice practitioner and peacemaker, and with an MBA and 15 years of corporate management and fiduciary responsibilities, I have a solid grasp of the kinds of skills, insights, values, and leadership District 200 needs. And, as an OPRF alum, parent, and woman of color with deep community roots, I bring a wealth of wisdom on how all students can excel and thrive.

Our community is best served when the voices of all are engaged in the conversation. I am running for District 200 school board to ensure the our high school community includes an equity of voices of all stakeholders, but most importantly our students.

As an elementary school educator it has been my focus to be the voice for the voiceless, my students. I volunteered to serve on the Culture, Climate and Behavior subcommittee of the board for the past two years and it is that work that has inspired me to run. As a union leader I bring a wealth of on the ground experience of how students, teachers, support professionals, administrators, board members, and community partners can develop the kinds of relationships that truly allow systemic change to be possible.

As a graduate of OPRFHS I was highly disappointed when I saw many of the same things I experienced 30 years ago happening to my daughter who is a recent graduate. I knew then that I had to raise my voice for equity. My mom moved us to Oak Park when I was in the 3rd grade because she heard that it was a welcoming community to raise biracial children. I am absolutely grateful that she did, as my growing up here has shaped the advocate I've become. It is a focal point of my life to ensure that equitable opportunities and treatment becomes part of every culture that I work in and support. I know that OPRF High School has the potential to become that space with the right leadership.

Having spent 15 years in corporate prior to becoming a teacher, I gained a solid background as a fiduciary. My years in management, coupled with my MBA, have given me the experience I feel is required to make sound financial decisions for our high school. In addition, I have served on both the National Education Association and Illinois Education Association (IEA) Budget Committees, as well as the statewide IEA Strategic Financial Planning Committee.

Lastly, what keeps me fueled as a restorative justice facilitator and trainer is unity. I know that true unity is absolutely possible regardless of past precedent or past practice. I have engaged in and supported districts in reshaping the narrative about labor management relationships. I have worked to ensure that our systems of education, and all the parts in it, are able to have meaningful conversations that produce results for our students.

Having raised two daughters, both in Oak Park and River Forest, I understand the link between our two towns and the importance of the relationship with our elementary schools. It is going to require systemic change for us to achieve equity and unity. I am ready, willing and qualified to continue the work as a member of the District 200 School Board.

## Ralph Martire

In addition to Ralph Martire's role as executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability ("CTBA"), he is also the Arthur Rubloff Endowed Professor of Public Policy at Roosevelt University. CTBA is a bipartisan 501(c)(3) think tank committed to ensuring that state, federal and local workforce, education, fiscal, economic and budget policies are fair and just, and promote opportunity for all, regardless of race, ethnicity or income class. During his time at CTBA, Ralph has helped obtain numerous legislative successes (including passage of the Evidence Based Model of Education Funding in FY2018, a state Earned Income Tax Credit, creation of a bipartisan legislative task force to integrate workforce and economic development policies, passage of the 2011 Temporary Tax Increases, corporate accountability legislation that, among other things, requires public reporting of economic development benefits created through receipt of tax breaks and other subsidies, decoupling Illinois tax policy from both the federal bonus depreciation rules and the federal repeal of the estate tax).

In 2018, Ralph was appointed to serve on the legislatively established "Professional Review Panel," charged with monitoring the implementation of Illinois' new evidence-based school funding formula. He was also appointed to the Transition Team of Governor-elect J.B. Pritzker. In 2011-2013, Ralph served as a full voting commissioner on the Congressionally-established "Equity and Excellence in Education Commission," which was housed in the Federal Department of Education's Civil Rights Division.

The Commission completed its work with the issuance of the "For Each and Every Child" report in February of 2013. Ralph co-authored the first section of the report, which made recommendations regarding the fiscal and education funding policies required at the state and federal levels to provide an excellent education to every child.

Ralph has received numerous awards for his work on education policy reform, including: being named River Forest's Co-Villager of the Year by the Wednesday Journal for his work promoting equity in District 90, where he serves as school board president; the 2007 Champion of Freedom Award, presented by the Rainbow PUSH Coalition to individuals whose professional work embodies Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, commitment to equal educational opportunities; and the Ben C. Hubbard Leadership Award given by Illinois State University to individuals who have greatly benefited education in Illinois. He also received the Adlai Stevenson Award for Public Service presented by the American Society for Public Administration to honor one individual with a connection to the Chicago area that has made outstanding contributions to government and public administration over an extended period of time.

Ralph was elected to serve on the School Board of River Forest District 90, where he still serves as board president. He also serves on the West Cook Division Governing Board of the Illinois Association of School Boards.

In addition to his professorship at Roosevelt University, Ralph has taught fiscal policy seminars and education finance courses for various universities and the International Fulbright Scholar Program. Ralph has been featured as a tax policy expert for numerous television and radio news programs such as WTTW, the Chicago PBS affiliate, and WPWR, the Chicago NPR affiliate. He is also a regular columnist on education, fiscal, and economic policy for the State Journal Register, the Daily Herald, and The News Gazette.

Ralph served as the deputy issues director for Dawn Clark Netsch in her gubernatorial campaign, and issues director for David Wilhelm in his run for the United States Senate. He is also a former candidate for the Cook County Board. His prior appointments include serving as a member of both the Cook County State's Attorney's Council on Hate Crimes Prosecution and Cook County Special Task Force on Domestic Violence, and chair of the state revenue committee on the budget advisory board of Governor Blagojevich's transition team.

Mr. Martire graduated from Indiana University Phi Beta Kappa, with a B.A. in history and received his JD from the University of Michigan.

He is married to Mary Kay Martire, and has two children, a son Nicholas, and a daughter Valerie.

## **Amanda Massie**

My Family and I lived in Oak Park for the first time from 1997-2003. Ours sons attended Whittier Elementary School, where I was actively engaged in the PTO and provided classroom support three to four days a week for the nearly 6 years they attended.

We moved from Oak Park to Virginia in 2003, due to a corporate transfer and subsequently resided in Philadelphia and southern California. Of all of the communities where we lived, Oak Park is the place we loved the most. The culture of inclusion is important to us. Although originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, when we had the opportunity, we chose to retire to Oak Park and purchased a fixer-upper in 2012 in south Oak Park.

Currently, I volunteer at the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry and am active in OPRF Pragmatic Solutions. I previously volunteered at the Animal Care League. In addition to my involvement at Whittier, while residing in southern California, I was actively engaged in both of the public high schools my sons attended and supported their sports teams.

My professional background and work experience are in management and accounting. I was a Supervisor at UPS for more than eight years and worked in accounting for various companies over the years.

My husband, Noel, has also been deeply involved in the communities we lived in. He currently serves as Chairman of the board for the Urban League of Los Angeles and was Board Chairman of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in 2014. He is U.S. Operations Manager at UPS and oversees its daily delivery operations.

Our son Pierce is a third year medical student here at Rush Medical College and our son Brayden graduated from Catholic University of America in 2017 with his BA in Psychology.

### **Why am I running for the D200 School Board?**

I am running for the D200 School Board because I want to positively impact the outcomes for all students. I also want to be involved in the fiscal decision-making. Over the past 3 years, my experience with the OPRF Pragmatic Solutions has shown me the importance of aligning D200's spending with its core mission: academic excellence for every student.

The catalyst for my candidacy was the docu-series America to Me. The inequity issues that exist at high school today deeply concern me. OPRF's reputation of excellence should extend to every student, and it has gaps that must be addressed. I am running because I believe I can be a positive difference in our student's education and the fiscal bottom line.

### **Key Issues facing D200**

Improve Academic Outcomes for all students

Addressing Racial Equity

Transparency

Expenses aligning with revenues

Facilities

## **Sara Dixon Spivey**

Sara first ran for the OPRF Board of Education 4 years ago on a racial equity platform but has since learned to love facilities projects and long-term financial planning. She is seeking a second (and final) term to ensure continued progress on issues of equity, finances, and facilities improvements.

Some of the achievements her achievements on the Board include:

- The first balanced budget in decades
- The first significant facilities project in almost 50 years which addresses special education spaces, classroom improvements, and ADA compliance
- Improved access to AP courses for students of color
- Restorative justice training for staff, administration, and Board
- Creation of the Culture, Climate and Behavior Committee to improve racial equity within the district and the Tri-Board Equity Committee to coordinate equity issues across all three districts (D200, D97, and D90)

Sara is an Assistant State's Attorney and defends the Cook County State's Attorney's Office in complex litigation matters in federal court. Until last July, she had spent her career as an Assistant Public Defender working her way from misdemeanors to murders and eventually becoming an attorney supervisor. Last year Sara had the privilege of managing the campaign of Judge Preston Jones, Jr., the first African American male to win a countywide judicial race in ten years. (Preston also happens to be Sara's better half.) Sara is also the proud mother of a future Huskie (Class of 2032).