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HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL PARENT BOARD

ELECTION CANDIDATE PROFILES

ARYA, Sanjeev Kumar

I am standing for School Board Membership with a deep commitment to enhancing student achievement, community engagement, and strategic governance. Over the past three years, I have served as a dedicated Board Member at Knighton Normal School in Hamilton, where I have actively contributed to school leadership, governance processes, and decision-making that reflects the values and aspirations of our diverse school community.During my tenure, I have supported initiatives that prioritise student well-being, inclusive education, and collaborative relationships between staff, parents, and whānau. I understand the responsibilities and accountabilities that come with governance roles and am experienced in working constructively with principals and senior leadership teams to deliver the school's strategic vision. My contributions include reviewing school policies, setting achievement targets, overseeing resource allocation, and ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for every child.I hold a Certificate in Governance from the Chartered Governance Institute of New Zealand (CGI NZ), which has strengthened my knowledge in areas such as strategic oversight, compliance, and board ethics. This professional training has equipped me to bring a thoughtful, informed, and transparent approach to decision-making, particularly in challenging or complex situations.My broader professional background spans over 18 years in healthcare, management, and education. I have worked as a university-level academic, a healthcare manager, and a safety professional. I am currently engaged in tertiary education as a Learning Delivery Adjunct at Te Pūkenga (Open Polytechnic), where I teach and assess students in healthcare and business programmes. This blend of experience allows me to view education through multiple lenses—governance, operational, and learner-focused.As a multilingual communicator and passionate community volunteer, I value inclusive participation and cultural responsiveness. I believe school boards must reflect the voices of all families and strive to remove barriers to success for every learner.I am seeking parent Board role here not only to build upon the foundations laid over the past three years but to continue being a proactive, approachable, and strategic voice on the board. My goal is to help shape a learning environment where every student feels valued, supported, and inspired to achieve their full potential.I would be honoured to continue serving our school and community in this important governance role.

BABU, Judith

I am working as Senior Analyst at HCL Technologies, Hamilton. I do have 20 years of experience in Education industry, as Mentor, teaching assistant, Instructor and handled many student related projects.In New Zealand I have conducted work shops for parents on How to handle NCEA exams practice for their children.If I would be selected I will provide all my skills, experience and talents for the development of school.

BAUCKE, Nephi

Kia ora Tātou, I'm honoured to stand for election to the Hillcrest High School Board of Trustees. My wife and I are proud parents of five children who have attended Hillcrest High School. Our youngest daughter is currently serving as Head Student and our youngest son is in his first year. We feel deeply connected to the school, especially Whānau Māori which has given our children opportunities to connect with their cultural heritage. Professionally, I bring strong leadership and governance experience. I currently serve as Director of Regional Public Service for Waikato, where I work across Central Government Agencies to improve outcomes for Whānau in our communities. I hold a Master of Public Management with Merit from Victoria University and have a background in strategic planning, public sector leadership, and community engagement. From 2020 to 2022, I was a trustee at Newstead Country Model School, gaining valuable experience in school governance, financial oversight, and supporting school leadership to deliver quality education. I'm passionate about helping young people thrive. I believe every student deserves a safe, inclusive and inspiring environment that nurtures their potential. As a trustee, I'll advocate for academic excellence, equity and the wellbeing of all students. Outside of work, I'm an avid sports fan who's been backing the Warriors from day one. I also love the Chiefs and the All Blacks. I've spent many hours on the sidelines supporting and cheering on our children in netball, touch, cricket, and futsal. I've also supported their involvement in Kapa Haka, Polynesian cultural groups, and the debating team. These experiences have given me a deep appreciation for the diverse talents of our young people and the importance of celebrating and supporting them in all areas of school life. It would be a privilege to contribute my skills, experience, and wholehearted commitment to the Hillcrest High School Board of Trustees. Thank you for considering my nomination.

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CHRISTOPHERSEN, Tagget

Kia ora koutou, I am currently one of the Deputy Principals at Cambridge Middle School and bring over 20 years of experience in education, including 12 years in senior leadership. Throughout my career, I have been committed to creating positive, inclusive learning environments where every ākonga can thrive. I have a strong focus on curriculum design, learning support, student engagement, and school transitions. I work closely with ākonga, whānau, and kaiako to ensure our young people are well supported academically, socially, and culturally. I am particularly passionate about the performing arts, mathematics, and supporting neurodiverse learners. I believe strongly in making evidence-based, data-driven decisions that are always centred on what is best for learners. Having worked alongside the Cambridge Middle School Board for the past 12 years, I understand the value of effective governance and the role it plays in shaping a school's direction and success. Hillcrest High School holds a special place in my heart – not only is it a school of significance for the wider community, but it's also where my husband, our siblings, and I all attended. I believe in the strength of its legacy, and I am committed to contributing to its continued success. It would be a privilege to serve on the board and work in partnership with you to support the future of Hillcrest High School.

EARLY, Rebecca

Kia ora koutou,My name is Rebecca Early, and I'm putting my name forward to be part of the School Board of Trustees. I've worked in education for over 20 years, including as a teacher, Deputy Principal, and Acting Principal. I've also taught at Hillcrest High School, so I know the school well and care deeply about its success.I'm a proud mum of three boys who have all attended Hillcrest High. Two of them are still students there and have done really well. I've seen first-hand how the school helps young people grow and succeed, both as a parent and as a teacher.Right now, I help lead learning across New Zealand through my role as National Leader of Learning at Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence school - the largest state school in the country with 30,000 students). I care deeply about making sure every student gets a fair and high-quality education. In my previous role at the Ministry of Education, I've helped schools improve how they teach and support students, and I've created learning resources that help both teachers and students succeed. I'm also studying for my Doctorate in Education, focusing on how to better support students with diverse learning needs in online learning.I believe in working together, listening to others, and making smart decisions that help our school community grow. If I'm elected, I'll bring my experience, energy, and strong belief in the power of education to the board.Thanks for your support,Rebecca Early

FABER, Alice

As a parent of 2 boys, both past and currently attending Hillcrest High School I have decided to put my name forward for the board.I have previously been on a board of trustees for an early childcare centre at the Ruakura campus and I currently chair the board of a mental health peer support service in the CBD.My day job is as a contractor of accounting services to a few businesses involved in residential construction. Previous roles have given me experience in staff management, human resources, asset management and even hospitality.I am passionate about education and student wellbeing and would love to contribute to a school that has seen my children thrive both academically and in sports/arts.

HEATON, Sharyn

Tēnei te mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa i tēnei wā whakahirahira. He uri ahau nō ngā rohe o Muāupoko, rātou ko Rangitāne, ko Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, ko Kai Tahu, ko Te Arawa hoki. E ū ana taku ngākau ki te manaaki i te iwi Māori me ā tātou mokopuna i te ao mātauranga hurihuri. I te ao o te mātauranga, ko te aronga matua o taku mahi ko te whakaū i te mātauranga Māori ki roto i ngā kura o Aotearoa hei tautoko i te angitū o ngā ākonga Māori.Kei te ū ahau ki te whakaaro, me noho mātātoa te reo Māori, ngā tikanga, te mātauranga Māori, me te mana Māori i roto i ngā kaupapa whakahaere o ngā kura. Ki tōku nei mōhio, mā te rangatiratanga, te mahi ngātahi, me te aroha ka taea e tātou te whakatipu kura auraki e whakaata ana i ngā moemoeā o te iwi Māori me ō rātou whānau.I bring a strong background in educational leadership, Māori research, and kaupapa Māori approaches to governance. My work focuses on integrating Māori knowledge in education, and I am passionate about supporting student achievement and wellbeing. As a board member, I would be committed to ensuring that the school honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi, provides culturally responsive teaching environments, and upholds the aspirations of mana whenua and Māori whānau.As a proud wahine Māori with deep ties to my iwi, and as a proud parent, educator, and researcher, I am passionate about uplifting our mokopuna to succeed as Māori. My work centres around cultural identity, wellbeing, and developing strong whānau-school partnerships. I advocate for a school environment that celebrates te ao Māori, supports te reo and tikanga, and ensures whānau voices are heard in decisions that affect our students. I believe in kotahitanga and collective responsibility for the success of all students.As an experienced educator whose research focuses on Māori knowledge systems and their application in our education sector, and with over 35 years' experience working in education, I believe I bring both a practical and academic expertise to a governance role. My commitment lies in enhancing outcomes for students through culturally sustaining practices, educational equity, and strengthening meaningful partnerships. My board involvement would be grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a belief that all students should be able to thrive in environments that reflect and respect their identity.

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MA, Andeed

Kia Ora Returning Officer,My name is Andeed Ma, and I am honoured to stand for election as a School Board Member. I bring with me a lifelong dedication to education, technology, and community service—with a vision to empower every student to thrive in an inclusive, future-ready learning environment.As a parent, mentor, and education leader, I believe schools play a pivotal role in shaping not only academic knowledge but also character, curiosity, and community values. My passion for helping others succeed is grounded in the question I ask in every role I undertake: "What can I do to help you?"Professionally, I serve as a university lecturer and programme advisor in AI, ethics, and analytics, and I am actively involved in shaping education standards as the Convenor for the ISO AI Management System. I also co-authored the book AI for Humanity to guide safe and sustainable technology use for future generations.In New Zealand, I serve as a Board Member and Treasurer of Seed Waikato, a youth empowerment non-profit focused on growth, leadership, and inclusion. I understand governance, financial oversight, and the value of listening to diverse community voices.I also bring a global perspective from decades of work across Asia-Pacific in leadership, risk management, and digital innovation—equipping me with practical experience to support student wellbeing, learning resilience, and digital citizenship in today's world.As a school board member, I will:Prioritise student safety, engagement, and achievement.Advocate for responsible digital learning and AI use in classrooms.Support teachers with the tools, training, and trust they need to thrive.Ensure financial and operational transparency through sound governance.Uphold values of inclusion, cultural respect, and community partnership.I am committed to representing all parents and students with integrity and openness. With your support, I will bring my energy, experience, and empathy to serve our school and its future.Ngā mihi nui, Andeed Ma

MAHARAJ, Avneet

Love to stand for election and to gain knowledge as how the system works.

MONEHAN, Tracey

I am proud to stand as a candidate for the school board. As a parent of a daughter currently attending Hillcrest High, I have a personal investment in the school's success and a deep belief in providing every child with the opportunity to thrive. In the time that my daughter has been at Hillcrest I have been immensely greatful for the opportunities available to her and the school's positive environment.Professionally, I bring a robust background in business, science, and software development, with extensive experience leading major initiatives that create lasting impact. My career has included working in public health, government departments, funding agencies, and commercial businesses. I've had hands-on experience collaborating with governance groups, senior leadership teams, and diverse stakeholder communities. In addition, I have experience in managing and developing staff, mentoring colleagues, developing and overseeing contracts, establishing policies and developing strategy and implementation plans, as well as managing multi-million dollar budgets. These skills have equipped me to navigate complex operational environments with clarity, accountability, and with a strong results focus.Known for developing novel solutions to difficult problems, I focus on removing barriers, aligning teams, and fostering shared success. My approach blends innovation with accountability, ambition with practicality, and ensures outcomes deliver tangible value.As a school board member, I will champion an inclusive and future-focused vision for education, one grounded in common sense, collaboration, strategic thinking, and community voice. I believe in policies that reflect our shared values, budgets that prioritise student outcomes, and governance that's transparent and effective. My professional experience gives me a deep appreciation for the complexities and realities of managing a business while still putting the primary voice, in this case our teachers and our students at the center of any decisions made. I have seen how much more can be achieved, when we bring people together around a common purpose and ensure that voices are heard. I believe I can bring this experience to the Board and support the Board and the school to achieve its goals.I'm not just offering my expertise, I'm offering partnership. I want our educators to be supported, our families to be heard, and our students to be inspired.

PRYOR, Shona

I'm Shona Pryor, a proud parent of two students currently attending Hillcrest High School and a long-time Hamilton local. I'm standing for the Board of Trustees because I care deeply about our school community and want to contribute to a positive, balanced environment where students can genuinely thrive.Professionally, I work as an Animal Health Manager at LIC, where I lead strategic initiatives, manage complex stakeholder relationships, and drive performance outcomes. My role involves problem-solving, clear communication, and making practical decisions that balance wellbeing with performance—skills I'd bring to the board.I've worked across science, education, and business, and I'm known for being practical, fair, and focused on solutions. I value transparency and teamwork, and I believe good governance means listening well, acting with integrity, and keeping things real.I'm a strong supporter of school activities and student engagement. Whether it's helping with work experience placements or turning up to events, I'm always keen to get involved. You'll often find me on the sidelines of the football field, cheering on my son and his team—rain or shine.Outside of work, I'm passionate about the outdoors. I'm an avid trail runner and more recently, I've taken up fastpacking—combining long-distance running with lightweight hiking. These adventures keep me grounded and remind me of the value of resilience, preparation, and a good laugh when things go sideways. I also enjoy spending time with my family and believe in the power of humour to get through the week's chaos.Hillcrest High has a strong foundation and a bright future. I'd love the opportunity to support that journey with energy, experience, and a genuine commitment to our students, staff, and families.

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RAHMAN, Mohammad Masudur

As I deeply committed to success and well being of our students I believe that active participation in educational leadership is a meaningful way to support positive change and ensure that every child has access to quality learning opportunities. My motivation to join the board stems from a strong belief in inclusive, transparent and forward thinking education. As I have about two decades of teaching, research and public sector work experience in different countries, I am eager to collaborate with fellow board members, educators and families to help shape policies and initiatives that reflect the needs and aspirations of our diverse school community.I am passionate about equity in education, student achievement, mental health support, curriculum development and I am committed to listening and contributing constructively to board discussions and decisions. Thank you for considering my interest.

RATU, Salome

My name is Salome, and I'm standing for election to the Hillcrest High School Board because I believe every student deserves fairness, dignity, and opportunity. I'm a proud parent, a strong advocate for student wellbeing, and someone who listens carefully and acts with empathy and respect.I have previously and I've worked closely with school leadership to address safety concerns and support student development. I've advocated for restorative practices that build confidence and community, and I've raised my voice when systems fall. I understand that for students to thrive, they must feel safe, heard, and empowered.I bring to this role a calm and professional communication style, along with an ability to navigate complex situations with clarity and integrity. My experience has shown me the importance of clear policies, consistent support, and inclusive decision-making. I care deeply about the well-being of our students—not only academically, but socially, emotionally, and culturally.If elected, I will focus on fostering respectful dialogue between families, staff, and the board. I will champion transparency in decision-making and work to ensure student voices are represented. I believe in practical solutions rooted in empathy, and I'm committed to strengthening the trust between our school and its wider community.Hillcrest High is an outstanding school with a rich culture of achievement and pride. I want to help build on that foundation, ensuring every student has a fair chance to succeed, and every family feels confident that their children are being treated with respect and care. I offer not only my passion and perspective but also a steady hand and a willingness to learn and collaborate.Thank you for considering me for this role. I welcome the opportunity to serve and contribute to a school board that puts students first.Thanking you in advance.Salome.

ROSS, Robin

Prior to retirement I spent the last ten years of my career as a senior executive in an industry-leading export-focussed business. My areas of accountability were broad and included operations, compliance, strategic and capital planning, property and legal. I have a good understanding of the role and importance of governance whether in a business or education environment.I strongly believe in the proverb "it takes a village to raise a child". In the context of education this means that parent and caregivers should engage with their child's school as much as their individual circumstances allow. Many parents and caregivers are time-constrained and are unable to attend things such as celebrations of student success, parent interviews or sporting and cultural events. I am fortunate in that I am able to. I attended the recent International Concert - an amazing celebration of the many cultures represented at Hillcrest High. Not only was the energy of the performers and the obvious pride they felt in sharing their cultural music and dances wonderful but the exuberant support from the mostly student audience was awesome.At the conclusion of the event my family agreed that (wow) there was something special about the school. It was this that prompted me to express interest in being on the Board.

SMYTH, Karen

Kia ora, my name is Karen Smyth and I'm the parent of a Year 10 student at Hillcrest High School. I'm excited to put my name forward for the Board and contribute to the ongoing success of the school and its community.I'm currently a General Manager at Fonterra, leading the Procurement function. In this role, I set strategy and ensure we have strong systems in place to monitor and report on performance. With over 15 years of leadership experience in roles across commercial and risk, I've developed deep expertise in commercial acumen, strategic planning, and sound governance.I'm passionate about education and believe strongly in the importance of providing an inclusive learning environment that supports a wide range of learners to succeed. I see schools as playing a critical role in shaping confident, capable young people—and I'd value the opportunity to contribute to that.I believe I can offer a clear, considered perspective to the Board, grounded in both professional experience and my commitment as a parent. It would be a privilege to serve the Hillcrest High School community.Ngā mihi,Karen Smyth

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ZHAI, Wendy

Kia ora,My name is Wendy Zhai, and I'm a parent in the Hillcrest community. I'm putting myself forward for the school board to support the wellbeing, learning, and success of all our tamariki. With a strong background in education and community engagement, I bring a passion for helping all children thrive in a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment.I hold a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of Waikato and have 9 years of experience teaching ESOL in NZ. This has given me a deep understanding of language, learning, and the challenges that many students and families face—especially newcomers.I currently work as a Community Engagement Coordinator at The Asian Network Inc., a Hamilton-based NGO, where I help design programmes that support the health, wellbeing, and education needs of ethnic communities. I also focus on bridging gaps between migrants and mainstream services.Alongside this, I've worked as an interpreter for many years, supporting people to navigate complex systems, better understand cultural differences, and communicate more confidently in critical settings such as schools, healthcare, and legal services.This year, I helped lead a series of Learning Community Hub sessions supported by the Ministry of Education, aimed at empowering Asian families with information about the New Zealand education system. We covered topics such as NCEA, school bullying, and how parents can better support their children's learning and wellbeing. The feedback from parents has been overwhelmingly positive, and I've seen how the right support at the right time can transform a child's education journey.I've also been a volunteer with the Citizens Advice Bureau for the past three years, assisting people with housing, employment, legal, and education-related issues, etc. Additionally, I serve as a committee member of the Waikato Multicultural Council, where I help plan events that bring together our region's vibrant communities.These experiences have strengthened my belief in the importance of accessible information, cultural understanding, and strong community-school partnerships.If elected, I will bring my skills in education, communication, and cross-cultural engagement to the board. I'm committed to ensuring all families feel welcome and included—and that every student has the support they need to reach their full potential.Ngaa mihi nui, Wendy Zhai

ZUBENKO, Yuri

As a PhD-qualified chemist with a background in both research and applied science. I've held academic positions at the University of Auckland and the University of Waikato, and I now serve as the Technical Manager at IVS Lab, where we work to ensure scientific accuracy and quality in laboratory testing across various industries.Beyond the lab and lecture theatre, I've always been committed to science education and public engagement. For several years, I ran a company that delivered live scientific shows to schools and private events. These shows aimed not only to entertain but to spark curiosity by bringing science to life in fun, hands-on, and often explosive ways.As a father to two daughters, aged 8 and 15, I've seen firsthand how important it is for children to build confidence in their ability to question, explore, and solve problems. I strongly believe that the future of our tamariki depends on their ability to integrate knowledge across all areas of STEM and apply it in innovative and practical ways.Education, in my view, should not be confined to memorising facts but should instead focus on helping students make connections between ideas and disciplines. Whether it's chemistry, coding, mechanics, or environmental science, the goal is the same: to give students the tools to understand the world around them and the confidence to improve it.I'm deeply committed to fostering a culture of curiosity, resilience, and collaboration. If I can play even a small part in helping students discover their potential and see the relevance of STEM in their lives and communities, then I will consider that a true success.Ngā mihi, Dr. Yuri Zubenko

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