

Candidate Statement for the 2020 – 2021 Tuscan Elementary School PTA Presidency
Jessica Horan Payne – June 13, 2020

I feel so lucky to be part of the Tuscan Tiger family and I appreciate the opportunity to apply for the position of PTA president. My name is Jess Horan and I've lived in Maplewood since 2013. Our daughters are in second and third grades at Tuscan and our son will start kindergarten in 2021. I've participated in many wonderful PTA-affiliated activities and traditions here: co-coordinating kindergarten Thanksgivings and the incoming kindergartners' parent orientation, as well as serving as a class parent twice. Two of my favorite Tuscan activities have been being a Tuscan Show director (Marching Band 2019!) and a library volunteer. In our larger community, my volunteering is focused on literacy and basic needs/food insecurity via the Friends of the Library, the Junior League (JLOSH), and Impact100 Essex.

My mantra is "Connect. Collaborate. Create." I excelled in doing this professionally, and I appreciate lending these skills to the schools and non-profits for which I volunteer. Now more than ever, our Tuscan community needs to support one another in accessible, thoughtful ways to help our families stay safe, sane and where possible, "sunny". There is so much good work to do! There is so much more to learn, and then do. A few initial thoughts:

CONNECT. *The PTA structure:* I suggest an updated class coordinator system, where every grade has a representative that is a liaison to individual classes/coordinators. This encourages more in-grade communication and collaboration. Also, install a historian/archivist position in order to collate and catalog the resources online to help simplify some of the annual traditions, and free up volunteer time for other contributions. *The PTA budget:* We have a large budget, but it's not always clear where the money goes, and why. Let's find new ways to consistently share how the PTA advocates for Tuscan, and how families can be part of the process.

COLLABORATE. There are several vibrant organizations doing critical work: The Achieve Foundation, Community Coalition on Race, MEND, The Parenting Center, SEPAC, SOMA Action, SOMAD & Tuscan's Green Teams, and SOMA Justice are some that to come to mind. In addition, we have BIG changes coming to our towns and our school – the integration plan and the building/facilities change are significant, to say the least! We need existing advocates ready, willing and able to summarize relevant highlights on our school's behalf. We need trained experts (think parent-architects, as an example) able to help interpret District-wide recommendations and updates.

CREATE. *Let's re-envision our PTA's vision.* Can we underwrite more for our families in financial need? Think class pictures, school supply kits, field trips, (more) yearbooks, overdrawn lunch accounts. Can we create more joy, especially while we are 'staying together, apart'? Think welcoming incoming kindergartners, celebrating our graduating 5th graders, and of course continuing to recognize our teachers and support staff. And what about supporting our sister schools, who have less books, supplies and funding? There is a lot to think about!

Speaking of connections, I can't think of a better person in our community with whom to be connected, but Ronni Schwartz. She is knowledgeable, compassionate, and a true asset to our school and community. Together, I hope we can serve Tuscan in fun yet substantive ways.

We appreciate your consideration, and your vote, this coming Tuesday!