

***PARNASSUS PREPARATORY SCHOOL***

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***VOTER  
GUIDE***

***TO THE CANDIDATES  
FOR ELECTION  
TO THE  
SCHOOL BOARD OF DIRECTORS***

**January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

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## INTRODUCTION

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This **Voter Guide** is designed to help everyone in the Parnassus Preparatory School community become acquainted with the candidates for the School Board election. Please consider Parnassus's strategic needs and the following background as you think about your choices.

### *The Overall Function of the School Board*

School Board members have a legal duty and an ethical obligation to ensure that Parnassus carries out its mission, vision, and goals for the entire school. As stated in our charter approved by the State of Minnesota, Parnassus's mission is to provide students with a classical education grounded in the classical Trivium that demands their best in intellectual achievement and character development. The School Board's job is to map out the strategies that will carry Parnassus into its successful future for the entire school community.

Therefore, as part of the School Board, each School Board member is a steward of Parnassus, responsible for its long-term viability. Whether a parent, teacher, or community member, School Board members do not represent particular constituencies, but focus on Parnassus's overriding interests and welfare.

### *This Election*

In this election, you will be voting for a parent representative. This **Voter Guide** will give you information on all the candidates.

We also have an open seat on the board for a community representative. Mr. Greg Friess was the only candidate for this position, and, as such, he is running unopposed and is the board member elect for this position. While there will be no voting for this position, his responses are included in this guide for your benefit.

In addition, we hope you will also plan to attend the **Candidate Forum** on Monday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00pm in the Agora, to meet and hear more from the candidates. Ballots will be mailed to the community members on Thursday, January 13<sup>th</sup>.

### *Needs of the School Board*

An effective School Board requires a diverse set of skills from its members. To achieve optimal success, we must have the following types of experience represented: finance, accounting, legal, marketing, technology, public affairs and education (particularly experience with classical philosophy). We ask you to consider candidates that would fulfill several existing needs on the School Board.

Many thanks for participating in this election. We have a very special school; by selecting thoughtful and committed School Board members, we can ensure that Parnassus builds on its promising beginning.

## COMMUNITY MEMBER CANDIDATE – MR. GREG FRIESS

*Mr. Friess is the only candidate for the open community member seat. As such, he is running unopposed and is the board member elect for this position. While there will be no voting for this position, his responses are included here for your benefit.*

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### 1) **Why are you interested in serving on the School Board?**

My interest in board service continues to be to help Parnassus pursue its unique mission of delivering a classical education to families who chose us. As a member of the board, I want to continue to provide guidance, support, and oversight to our administrative team. I want to be a part of a collegial, professional board that represents our entire community—families, staff and scholars.

### 2) **Which aspect of our organization interests you most?**

I would like to continue to use my experience to closely monitor the financial health of the school. Our school has a solid financial position and a strong outlook. In my next board term, I would like to focus our planning on sustaining this financial strength as our enrollment reaches a stable level.

My other area of interest is to focus on organizational development and continuity. As we work through the challenges of the pandemic and continue our ‘path to normalcy’ I would like to work with the board and our Administration to strengthen the pipeline of future board members and committee members to sustain our school for generations.

Most importantly, I want to work with the board to maintain our mission of delivering a classical education.

### 3) **What are some of your previous volunteer experiences or leadership roles in non-profits?**

My most relevant experience is my long-term service on the board here at Parnassus. Previously, I had volunteer experience in coaching youth sports and board service for Scouting programs.

4) **What appeals to you about School Board services as a volunteer activity?**

I started serving on the Parnassus Board because I wanted to help bring a choice in public education to families here in the Northwest Suburbs. That continues to be the main reason why I want to serve. My experience has taught me the importance of having a professional, high-functioning board for the overall success and stability of a school. A high-functioning board is where the board, and individual board members, represent the entire organization—not serving as advocates for specific groups or factions. I think our board has worked well with our administration over the years and that has also been a key factor in Parnassus' success. I would like to be a part of maintaining and building upon this success.

5) **An effective School Board requires a diverse set of skills from its members. To achieve optimal success, we would like to have diverse experience represented, such as: legal, business acumen, real estate, marketing, finance, accounting, public affairs and education (particularly experience with classical education philosophy). Of the skills needed on the School Board, which do you possess?**

Through my service on the board, I have developed a solid understanding of Minnesota Charter School law as well as Education Finance here in the state. This experience includes working with bond investors as part of our financing, construction oversight, banking relationships and working with city officials on areas of common concern.

In my previous career as an investment analyst, I researched and analyzed hundreds of companies, reviewing their business plans, management teams and financials. This has given me some insights as to what makes a successful organization. It has allowed me to be part of an organization here at Parnassus that brings successful business practices to running a charter school.

For the last 15 years, I have worked in a small business environment dealing with the day-to-day realities of accounting, regulation, customer service and banking. This has allowed me to bring an 'entrepreneurial spirit' to my role as a board member. Our flexibility and nimbleness at Parnassus have served us well as we have navigated the challenges—past, present, and future—that all charter schools face.

**6) Parnassus is a classical school. Please describe your experience with and interest in classical education.**

As a board member, I have encouraged our board's commitment to classical education by attending school colloquia and participating in our annual board book discussions. Each year our board reads one or two of the same books that staff and scholars read. It has been an enjoyable part of board service—and it has kept us focused on our mission of delivering a classical education.

As part of serving on the board, I have had the opportunity to do networking and meet with other school board members—both charter and traditional district schools. I can't stress enough how important our clear commitment to classical education is here at Parnassus. It gives us a driving focus at the board level and throughout our institution. I have seen examples of the struggles that can result from schools who do not have a clear sense of mission. Our commitment to our mission has been a distinguishing factor for Parnassus with our bond investors, our Authorizer, our staff, and our families.

**7) What additional skills, connections, resources, and expertise do you have to offer and are willing to use on behalf of Parnassus (such as fundraising, grant writing, previous board experience, etc.)?**

I think the most important 'additional' skill I can bring to the board is simply the experience gained from helping to navigate Parnassus' response to the on-going pandemic. As a board, we have had to make difficult decisions. We have had to weigh the concerns of the entire school community and decide on actions which we knew would be unpopular with some of our families. This, of course, is true for almost anyone who has served on a school board in recent years. But it is invaluable experience nevertheless. It has been a humbling and sometimes difficult experience, but I know it has better prepared me for my next term of service on the board.

*The content of this candidate's responses has not been altered or edited in any way.*

## PARENT REPRESENTATIVE CANDIDATE – MR. BEN ARK

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### 1) Why are you interested in serving on the School Board?

I am the current Vice-Chair of the Parnassus Board of Directors and have been a board member for just over four years. I am interested in serving on the board to continue the good work we've done, help lead our school through challenging times, and support our scholars' academic growth and success. As a board member, I have advocated for and created opportunities to build an engaged school community. In recent years, I have become increasingly concerned about divisive rhetoric and efforts to politicize school boards; I want to keep the Parnassus board's work focused on what's best for *all* of our scholars and the long-term success of the school. I bring a pragmatic and thoughtful approach to addressing controversial issues and making difficult decisions. My record on the board demonstrates my commitment and passion to fulfill the Parnassus mission and vision.

Looking back, my interest in the school began before the doors first opened over ten years ago. Seeing students in my family's home district struggle to get a challenging, rigorous, and inclusive education spurred our interest in exploring Parnassus as an educational option. I watched the school steadily grow and eventually reach a point of maturity to complete the expansive construction and bonding project. I knew this was a special place and one that I wanted to help serve.

I first started attending school board meetings on a regular basis about six years ago—during a particularly challenging time in board/parent relations. I wanted to learn more about how the school board functioned and what its role was in the governance of the school. I wanted to understand how decisions were made and how policies were written. I wanted to contribute to the long-term success of the school and help create opportunities for families to be engaged and build community around our very special school of choice.

In the fall of 2017, the time was right to get more involved. I was asked to fill an open board seat on an interim basis. I later ran for and won that seat. A year later, I led the board's efforts to implement a more expansive fundraising effort including drafting

policies and the forming and chairing of a board-level advisory committee. I have regularly facilitated volunteer meetings to conceive, plan, and execute events which led to Zeus on the Loose, Turkey Bingo and the Turkey Trot, Give to the Max Day, and our recent Scarecrow Scamper. As a board member, I have been exceptionally honored to participate in the graduation procession for our first three graduating classes.

The last two years have forced us all to confront a host of unexpected issues. We made some difficult and controversial board-level decisions to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing how critical these decisions are, I always work hard to understand the perspectives of *everyone* we serve, including our families, teachers, and staff. I make it a priority to listen to *all* of our families' concerns and evaluate their input as well as the input of educational and public health experts. I look to understand the policies and practices of other schools in our area. I work to understand my own biases and perspectives. I strive to balance all of this with what is best for the long-term future of Parnassus. My record shows that I have worked to prioritize student and staff safety while doing everything we can to give our children the best chance to succeed and "get back to normal."

One might imagine that serving on a school board is a thankless and unrewarding job. On the contrary, serving Parnassus—especially during these difficult times—is a continued point of pride and joy. I remain passionate and committed to supporting, developing, and leading Parnassus as a board member for the next four years.

**2) Which aspect of our organization interests you most?**

The Parnassus mission and philosophy are the cornerstones of our school. They embody and enable true freedom through a disciplined, well-educated mind while building habits of perseverance, courage, integrity, and the character pillars that make Parnassus scholars some of the best students in Minnesota—as proven by our exceptional national and state rankings.

In my role as a board member, I have always worked to evaluate core decisions through the lens of our mission and philosophy. I commend our founders for giving us such a strong foundation to build upon. If re-elected, I will continue to lead in a mission-centered manner focusing on building well-educated scholars who demonstrate the Parnassus pillars of character to lead and serve our community, nation, and world for generations to come.

**3) What are some of your previous volunteer experiences or leadership roles in non-profits?**

I have volunteered and fundraised for organizations which serve disenfranchised and underserved peoples such as Community Emergency Assistance Programs, Feed My Starving Children, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. I have also served in elected and volunteer capacities in my neighborhood association. As noted above, I have been a



board member at Parnassus for the last four years and served in a leadership/coordination capacity for our fundraising and community-building events.

**4) What appeals to you about School Board services as a volunteer activity?**

Serving on a school board is an opportunity to support the development of our children and help influence our future. It is an exceptional responsibility. At Parnassus, we provide a high-quality classical education. From individual scholars' stories of growth to national recognition of our academic programs, Parnassus has a demonstrated track record of success. I hope my role in serving on the board has had some small part in building that success. If re-elected, I will continue to work to further strengthen our school's academic results, build opportunities for families to be engaged in the school community, and provide analytical, balanced, and purposeful oversight of board-level functions.

**5) An effective School Board requires a diverse set of skills from its members. To achieve optimal success, we would like to have diverse experience represented, such as: legal, business acumen, real estate, marketing, finance, accounting, public affairs and education (particularly experience with classical education philosophy). Of the skills needed on the School Board, which do you possess?**

My education and professional background are in technology and software development. My current role as an IT executive requires analytical, forward-looking, mission-focused strategic planning and critical evaluation of projects and initiatives to be successful. I manage budgets, set goals, assess performance, support professional growth, and hold myself and my team accountable. In my professional capacity, I have reviewed many contracts, legal documents, policies, and procedures with a critical eye toward thoroughness and achieving the expected results. Every day, I bring those same analytical and strategic qualities to my contribution as a Parnassus board member.

**6) Parnassus is a classical school. Please describe your experience with and interest in classical education.**

While attending secondary school, I had the good fortune to participate in a summer-school program on etymology. Etymology, the study of the origin of words and language, has always fascinated me. Much is to be gained in understanding our personal experiences, our cultural truths, our religious beliefs, our democratic processes, and our global history by studying classical languages and the teachings of ancient scholars.

As a former student of language with a passion for understanding our history, I have felt a strong affinity for what a classical education can provide not only to my children but to *all* our children. Combining a classical language focus with rigorous, teacher-led instruction has proven to be a winning formula at Parnassus.

Societal norms evolve and pressures mount to influence our curriculum and pedagogy. I will continue to work with our administration to support and strengthen our focus on classical and foundational literature, our study of language and history, and our adoption

of educational techniques and systems to reinforce our mission and ultimately develop well-rounded scholars who are prepared for their futures' challenges and opportunities.

**7) What additional skills, connections, resources, and expertise do you have to offer and are willing to use on behalf of Parnassus (such as fundraising, grant writing, previous board experience, etc.)?**

As noted above, I have over four years of experience on the Parnassus board. I have led and organized Parnassus fundraising and community-building events. I am a member of several business organizations with connections to leaders in a variety of industries. My experience in business leadership comes with knowledge of employment relations and law, crafting effective policy and procedures, evaluating budgets and financial reports, motivating and inspiring the best in people, and most importantly working collaboratively with a wide variety of people to solve problems.

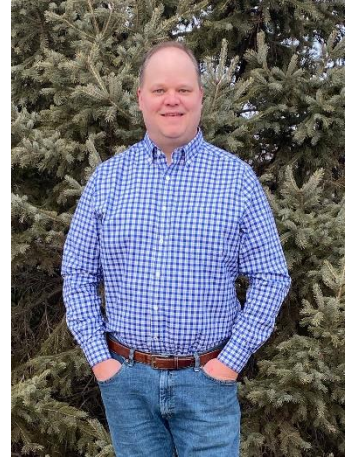
*The content of this candidate's responses has not been altered or edited in any way.*

## PARENT REPRESENTATIVE CANDIDATE – MR. CHRIS DANIELS

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### 1) Why are you interested in serving on the School Board?

My interest in serving on the school board is to ensure that all scholars receive the education that was promised at the founding of this school. My role on the board will be to follow the guiding principals of why we chose to enroll our children into this school initially. Those principals include the integrity of the curriculum and character of the school. I also think parental input needs to be heard, respected, and acted upon relative to practices, rules and cultural influences contrary to the pillars.

### 2) Which aspect of our organization interests you most?

The ability to help maintain or renew the high standards that brought us to this school. While there are influences coming from many different angles that would seek to change the direction of school, they have no usefulness in our curriculum as they do not serve to improve the outcome for our scholars. I plan to be a guardian at the gate to defend our school and our scholars.

### 3) What are some of your previous volunteer experiences or leadership roles in non-profits?

I have worked with our church to help set up and host events including a food shelf, construction and set up for summer camps along with other church events. I have also worked with an education group as a board member and unpaid lobbyist at the State Capitol to help initiate and influence legislation.

### 4) What appeals to you about School Board services as a volunteer activity?

Preserving the integrity of our school is my primary reason for running. I see influences both inside and outside of the school that I don't think match up with the foundation of the school or is what parents truly want for their scholars. To be able to work with the parents and teachers to ensure we stay the course seems like a noble and fulfilling task.

I firmly believe in the Pillars of what this school was founded on and guided by. I firmly believe in the Pillars of what this school was founded on. I am driven by a search for the truth in any subject I approach, and firmly believe in the Socratic method to discover that truth. My pursuit is precisely what led us to be a Founding Family at Parnassus. I want to ensure the integrity of the School Board, curriculum and quality of education is held to the ideals initiated during upon its inception. Since the inception of the school, I have been a part of trying to support the school and trying to protect the original intent of the quality education this school can provide left undisturbed.

**5) An effective School Board requires a diverse set of skills from its members. To achieve optimal success, we would like to have diverse experience represented, such as: legal, business acumen, real estate, marketing, finance, accounting, public affairs and education (particularly experience with classical education philosophy). Of the skills needed on the School Board, which do you possess?**

I have been a business owner for most of my working life and have been successful in business because I work hard, I am creative, and I am diligent about details. I strive to constantly evolve in business and life through constant acquisition of knowledge. I went to school at University of Minnesota - Duluth a received a Bachelor of Science in Hydrogeology with minors in Chemistry and Biology. Although I don't work in the science field, the scientific method is how I try to approach every challenge and topic.

In my business life, I have built a few different ventures into multi million-dollar businesses. I have the ability to set a vision, and then put in the hard work and put the people into place that allows the execution of that vision. I am a problem solver that doesn't look to pass the blame or find the fastest easiest method to address issues. I tackle hard issues head on and ensure the best outcome and ways to avoid those same or similar issues in the future.

**6) Parnassus is a classical school. Please describe your experience with and interest in classical education.**

Before my wife Angie and I even had children, I knew that we were not going to take the usual path in their education. At that time, there wasn't a Parnassus option yet, but thankfully it came along. I was at the first meeting about the school at the small library in Brooklyn Park with 2 other parents, and from there our journey began. We were convinced that this could be our school based simply on the vision and foundation of the curriculum. I am a big believer in what Parnassus was founded on. The Socratic method and the search for truth is an important foundation in our home.

**7) What additional skills, connections, resources, and expertise do you have to offer and are willing to use on behalf of Parnassus (such as fundraising, grant writing, previous board experience, etc.)?**

Being in self employed for as long as I have been, I have learned many creative ways to increase sales. Fundraising is simply a different version of sales in that the product you are

selling isn't necessarily something you can hold in your hand like something you buy from target. It is selling a vision that someone finds enough intrinsic value in to invest. There are many creative ways I have formulate that can be implemented on a large or small scale.

For a large-scale option, it might be working with a particular business, or sector of business, to build understanding about how the classical curriculum can benefit their workforce. That basis can create a partnership with that company or sector to invest in the future of well-educated scholars.

For small-scale fundraising, it needs to involve the community and getting our scholars involved in a more direct way to foster relationships with our school. This would aid in improving the scholars public speaking and critical thinking in real world experiences.

***The content of this candidate's responses has not been altered or edited in any way.***

