

Profile for Deanna "Dee" Darling, Cary School District 26 Board Member

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

- **Full Name:** Deanna Darling
- **Age:** 57 (as of 2023)
- **Residence:** Cary, Illinois
- **Education:**
 - Hoffman Estates High School, 1983
 - William Rainey Harper College, 1985
- **Occupation:** Operations Manager in Packaging
- **Family:** No specific details about family members were provided in the sources, but Darling has indicated no relatives work in politics or government within the Cary District 26.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Deanna "Dee" Darling's political ideology is not explicitly detailed in available sources with a clear label (e.g., "Democrat," "Republican," or "Independent"). However, based on her activities, affiliations, and public statements, some inferences can be made about her ideological leanings:

Progressive Leanings

- **Community Involvement:** Darling is a member of McHenry County NOW (National Organization for Women), which typically aligns with progressive and feminist values, advocating for gender equality and social justice.
- **Support for Public Education:** She emphasizes strong support for public education, advocating for competitive teacher salaries, equitable opportunities, and countering attacks on public schools. This aligns with progressive priorities that prioritize robust public sector investment and education as a public good.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Darling views DEI as an area for continuous improvement in Cary District 26, suggesting a commitment to inclusive policies, which is often associated with progressive ideology.

Pragmatic and Community-Focused

- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Darling has shown a cautious approach to financial decisions, such as opposing a 3% salary increase for administrators in 2020 to

maintain fiscal stability, indicating a pragmatic streak that balances progressive goals with taxpayer concerns.

- **Nonpartisan Role:** As a school board member, her focus is on nonpartisan governance, prioritizing district success over ideological battles. Her campaign emphasizes local issues like curriculum quality, teacher support, and community engagement rather than national political divides.

Local Advocacy

- **Community Organizing:** Founding Together We Stand McHenry County, Inc., and organizing events for local nonprofits suggest a grassroots, community-oriented approach, which can transcend strict ideological lines but often aligns with progressive community activism.
- **No Ties to Alternative Education Systems:** Her explicit statement of having no vested interests in private or alternative education systems reinforces a commitment to public institutions, a stance more commonly associated with progressive or liberal ideologies.

Lack of Partisan Affiliation

- Sources do not indicate a formal affiliation with a political party, and her role as a precinct committee person (Algonquin 12 and 57) does not specify a party. School board elections in Illinois are nonpartisan, and Darling’s public persona avoids overt partisan rhetoric, focusing instead on education and community welfare.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY CONCLUSION

Deanna Darling’s political ideology appears to *lean progressive*, particularly in her support for public education, DEI, and feminist-aligned organizations like NOW. However, her pragmatic approach to fiscal decisions and focus on local, nonpartisan governance suggest she prioritizes practical outcomes over rigid ideological alignment. Without explicit statements from Darling or additional context, it’s difficult to pin her to a specific political label. Her actions reflect a blend of progressive values and community-focused pragmatism.

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Current Role: Cary District 26 School Board Member (2019–present), serving as Board President (as of 2022–2023).

Previous Roles

- Algonquin 12 Democrat Precinct Committee Person
- Algonquin 57 Democrat Precinct Committee Person

Community Engagement

- Founder of Together We Stand McHenry County, Inc.
- Member of McHenry County NOW (National Organization for Women)
- Volunteer at Crystal Lake Food Pantry
- Fundraiser for A Heart for Animals (animal rescue)
- Organizes community events to support local nonprofits and food drives for those in need

SCHOOL BOARD TENURE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Elected:** Initially a write-in candidate in 2019, winning a four-year seat with 234 votes, the second-highest among write-in candidates. Re-elected in 2023.
(<https://www.nwherald.com/2019/04/08/3-write-in-candidates-win-cary-d-26-school-board-seat/a8whtbn/>, <https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>)

Leadership Roles

- Board President (as of 2022–2023)
- Board Legislative Liaison (with Kathryn Potter)
- Member of the Community Engagement/Planning Committee (with Stacey Sault)
- Ethics Commission (with Kathryn Potter and Brian DeRoo)
- Policy Committee member
- Part of the strategic planning team

Key Contributions

- Advocated for competitive teacher wages and benefits to address teacher shortages, emphasizing the need to match neighboring districts in salary, benefits, class size, support staff, and planning time. <https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>
- Supported two successful labor contract negotiations, including a four-year teacher contract secured before the school year, a rarity in recent years.
<https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>

- Played a role in navigating the district through the COVID-19 pandemic, prioritizing in-person learning while ensuring a safe environment for students and staff.
<https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>
- Voted on policies to maintain educational quality and fiscal responsibility, including supporting a \$20 million bond referendum in 2024 for school building improvements.
<https://www.dailyherald.com/topics/cary-district-26/>
- Supported the approval of a new transportation center at the Maplewood site, addressing safety concerns with the existing facility.
<https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/news/2023/09/07/cary-school-district-26-approves-new-maplewood-transportation-center-a-week-after-it-stalled/>

Stance on Issues

- Strong advocate for public education, emphasizing equal educational opportunities for all students and countering attacks on public schools and educators.
<https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board> <https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>
- Views Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as an area for continuous improvement within the district. <https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>
- Opposed a 3% salary increase for administrators in 2020 (along with Kathryn Potter) to maintain fiscal caution, though supported raises for nonunion education support personnel. <https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20200702/cary-district-26-school-board-approves-salary-increases-gets-update-on-return-to-school-task-force>

Campaign and Philosophy

- **Campaign Website:** <https://www.friendsofdarling.com> (as of 2023)
- **Core Beliefs**
 - Public education is critical, drawing from her own experience as a product of public schools and the lasting impact of dedicated teachers.
<https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>
 - Emphasizes the importance of a positive student-teacher dynamic for academic success and supports teachers as highly educated professionals, particularly women, who shape students' lives. <https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>

<https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>

- Focuses exclusively on the success of Cary District 26, with no vested interests in alternative educational institutions.

<https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>

- **Goals**

- Ensure the district meets community expectations for quality education, up-to-date curriculum, and competitive staff compensation.
- Continue strategic planning to move the district forward, building on progress made since 2019.
- Foster community engagement through meet-and-greets to discuss funding mechanisms like TIFs and state/federal contributions to ease the tax burden on homeowners. <https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>

NOTABLE EVENTS AND CONTROVERSIES

- **COVID-19 Response:** Darling supported the district's goal of resuming in-person learning as soon as safely possible, balancing educational needs with safety protocols. <https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board>
- **Mask Policy Tensions:** As Board President in 2022, she led the board during a contentious period when some parents protested mask mandates, leading to a temporary shift to virtual meetings after an incident on August 30, 2021, where police were called due to noncompliance. The board returned to in-person meetings in March 2022. <https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/news/2022/04/27/cary-district-26-school-board-keeps-leadership-as-it-returns-to-in-person-meetings/>
<https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20220428/cary-district-26-school-board-keeps-leadership-as-it-returns-to-in-person-meetings>
- **Maplewood Transportation Center:** Darling advocated for the new transportation center despite opposition from the Cary-Grove Youth Baseball and Softball organization, emphasizing the need to replace an unsafe, outdated facility. She expressed hope for collaboration with the community to address the baseball group's concerns. <https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/news/2023/09/07/cary-school-district-26-approves-new-maplewood-transportation-center-a-week-after-it-stalled/>

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

- **Support:** Praised by peers like Vice President Melinda Hartman for her integrity and leadership during challenging times.[](<https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/news/2022/04/27/cary-district-26-school-board-keeps-leadership-as-it-returns-to-in-person-meetings/>)
- **Criticism:** Faced backlash from some community members, such as Cary resident Monika Gwizdz, who criticized the board’s handling of COVID policies in 2022, calling their judgment “disgusting” and “out of control.”
<https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/news/2022/04/27/cary-district-26-school-board-keeps-leadership-as-it-returns-to-in-person-meetings/>

Additional Notes

- Darling’s leadership has been marked by a commitment to transparency and community involvement, as seen in her encouragement of residents to attend board meetings and her role in organizing community events.
<https://patch.com/illinois/crystallake/deanna-darling-candidate-district-26-school-board> <https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>
- Her tenure reflects a focus on long-term district stability, with involvement in strategic planning and policy development to support the district’s mission of fostering critical thinkers and innovative creators. <https://www.cary26.org/our-district/board-of-education>[(<https://www.cary26.org/domain/432>

For further details, you can visit the Cary District 26 website (www.cary26.org) or Darling’s campaign site www.friendsofdarling.com <https://www.cary26.org/our-district/board-of-education> <https://www.shawlocal.com/news/election/2023/03/14/deanna-darling-cary-school-district-26-board-of-education-election-questionnaire/>

Note: This profile is based on available information from web sources and does not include unverified or speculative details.