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Biographical Question

1. *Does anything in your personal or professional background give you particular perspectives or skills that you can contribute to the School Committee?*

My professional background in education would add a different perspective to the School Committee. I have worked as an educational researcher with a Doctorate in Education from Harvard University, where I studied how students learn and critical/creative thinking. These insights could be beneficial in working with colleagues and the new superintendent to redefine an educational vision that focuses on enhancing student learning and supporting outstanding teaching.

Through my active involvement with the Lexington schools for nearly 20 years, I have gained a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the entire system, which is essential for district-wide decision-making. My children attended elementary, middle, and high school in Lexington. I've worked actively at both the school level (Bridge classroom volunteer, Clarke/LHS Site Councils) and the town-wide level with School Committee members, administrators, teachers and staff (Superintendent Search Committee, Ad Hoc Committee for Youth-at-Risk, Lexington Community Coalition). This broad perspective and in-depth knowledge of the system will be helpful in understanding the issues and making district-wide decisions.

As a Chinese-American born and educated in the U.S., I would bring a unique multicultural perspective to the Committee which could help in building cultural understanding and serving the needs of all students. With a 34% Asian student population, it would be helpful to have a

member of the School Committee who is able to bring insights and cultural perspectives in working together with the schools and the community.

Candidate Platform

2. Why are you running for School Committee?

I am running for School Committee because I would like to bring my 20 years of experience working with the Lexington schools and my professional background in education to help support and improve our school system. I feel that this is a very exciting time to be on the School Committee because we have a new Superintendent who will be proposing goals and priorities for the district to the School Committee. I look forward to the opportunity to work with School Committee colleagues and the Superintendent to redefine an educational vision for the coming years.

I also recognize that we face many complex challenges, including enrollment increases, school building projects, demographic changes, and student stress. In tackling these challenges, I would seek community and staff input, and aim to bring sound and balanced judgment to the decision-making process.

I believe that my comprehensive knowledge of the school system from many years of active involvement at the school and town-wide level will be an asset in understanding issues facing the system and making informed decisions with my colleagues. I already have excellent working relationships with the Superintendent and all of the School Committee members, and will be able to work collaboratively with everyone to serve the best interests of our schools.

3. What are your top priorities for the Lexington school system?

My top priorities for the Lexington school system are to:

- Set priorities and form an educational vision for the system that focuses on enhancing student learning and supporting quality teaching
- Maintain the educational quality of our schools as enrollment increases and work diligently to balance essential space needs with fiscal concerns
- Reduce student stress, academic and social pressures, and the competitive culture within our schools, and help students build resiliency, create balance and improve their well-being

Policy Questions

4. *What is the proper role of the School Committee in relationship to the Superintendent? What is the proper role of the School Committee in relation to school staff?*

The responsibility of the School Committee is to develop and oversee educational policy, approve the annual budget, and hire and evaluate the superintendent. As the chief educational officer for the district, the Superintendent leads staff in establishing procedures and practices to implement School Committee policies, and provides professional leadership in the management and operation of the school system.

An effective School Committee works as a unified team with the Superintendent with strong collaboration and mutual trust. It is important to honor, respect, and adhere to their respective roles. The collective role of School Committee members is to have broad oversight of and responsibility for the school system through policy-making and direction-setting. Day-to-day operation of the school system is the responsibility of the Superintendent. The proper role of the School Committee in relation to school staff is to work through the Superintendent. Given that staff work under the direction and supervision of the Superintendent, they report to the Superintendent, not the School Committee. Therefore, in matters involving operations within the system, School Committee members should work through the Superintendent rather than directly with school staff.

A close working relationship among School Committee members, and between the School Committee and the Superintendent, is critical for a school system to be highly successful. It is important that communications between and among the parties are clear, open, and consistent. Good communication requires the establishment of trust. School Committee members and the Superintendent must show mutual respect, have confidence in each other's abilities to carry out their respective roles, and join together in their shared interest of serving the needs of students and the school system.

5. *Is the School Committee on the right track regarding school construction plans to address overcrowding? What changes, if any, would you like to see to the current elementary and middle school capacity plans?*

The School Committee's school construction plan is necessary to address overcrowding and building conditions. The rebuilding of Hastings School is critical due to the age and condition of the building and, as a 30-section school, is an essential part of the plan to relieve overcrowding. We are fortunate that the state MSBA has authorized proceeding with a feasibility study that could lead to partial state funding of the project, thus reducing the cost to Lexington taxpayers. The addition of modulars at three elementary schools and Phase 1 limited redistricting to available space at Estabrook and one class at Hastings will help address elementary enrollment until a new Hastings is built.

For educational and practical reasons, I support the plan that builds additions at both Clarke and Diamond, rather than having all growth at Diamond. The relative size of the additions are scaled to each school's needs and site accommodations. The plan allows for more balanced enrollment and room for growth respectively at the two middle schools, better alignment with feeder schools, and the ability to sustain quality programming at each school.

Going forward, I would like to see sensible short-term and long-range redistricting plans to use available space without undue disruption to families, a well-thought-out plan for the pre-school program, innovative and feasible plans for use of the Pelham property if acquired, and attention to reducing costs where possible, but in ways that will not prove to be wasteful in the long run or adversely affect educational quality. As we progress with these projects, it is vital to continue with careful tracking of enrollment trends during the construction projects to assure that we are meeting facility needs and have options if more must be done.

6. Do you think that Lexington is ready to support a large capital debt exclusion override, and a large operating budget override to accommodate our larger enrollments? Have there been any school debt exclusions or overrides in the past that you did not support?

With rapidly rising enrollment in our schools, the problem we are facing is the need to address multiple school capital projects at the same time, as well as the associated operating budgets needed to accommodate more students. We have an obligation to educate the children of our community and yet we know that providing the space, staffing and operating costs to do so presents a great burden on our taxpayers.

We need to put forth plans that maintain the educational quality of our schools in a way that balances essential space needs with fiscal concerns. The core of educational quality comes from the people – interactions of teachers and students – and the richness of programming we offer. To maintain high quality teaching and learning, we must create sufficient space to teach effectively, with favorable class sizes, equity of programming, and safe/healthy environments.

It is up to the community to decide if it is prepared to support the capital needs and operational costs necessary to maintain the level of educational quality we provide, even as enrollment increases. By voting for educationally-sound plans that are also fiscally-responsible, we can continue to provide a high quality of education to all students. In considering a debt exclusion or operating budget override, the community needs to understand the implications of not funding these expenses and the negative impact it may have on class sizes and breadth of programming in our schools.

7. Should we teach foreign languages in elementary school? If so, what trade-offs would you make to bring this about?

Anyone who has witnessed in young children the ability to mimic sounds and pick up the nuances of language can see that children have a natural language ability at early ages. Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to a language the easier it is to learn another language. Some studies have found that children who study a foreign language show greater

cognitive development in areas such as mental flexibility and creativity. In a global society, having exposure to another language is extremely valuable. We would all agree that teaching foreign language in elementary school is highly desirable.

I would look to the school administration to recommend what it would take to reestablish foreign language in our elementary schools . What grades, what languages, what impact to the entire elementary programming, and what adjustments would have to be made to the overall school system budget to make it possible. Most importantly, from my perspective, will be how well the curriculum is developed and how it would be implemented.

8. What, if anything, should be done to improve academic excellence in Lexington?

If you measure academic excellence in terms of academic achievement, Lexington would be considered to be at a high level of excellence. Students are rightfully proud of their personal accomplishments and we, as a community, take pride in the excellence of our schools.

Rather than just talking about improving academic excellence, I would ask instead what can be done to improve student learning. Our mission as educators is to help students develop reasoning and thinking skills that will carry with them through their lives. We want to foster the joy of learning, have students experience working through a difficult problem, enjoy the process of learning as much as the outcome, and have opportunities to develop and pursue passions. For example, we might look at more opportunities to engage students in the process of doing science inquiry rather than just studying content. The act of doing inquiry not only gives students experience with the process, but it also changes students' conception of what science is.

Finding ways to improving on student learning might involve reviewing curriculum, looking at the ways we do assessment, re-balancing how we use instructional time, reviewing graduation requirements, or providing more mentoring for teachers.

9. A national discussion is taking place about the intense focus on achievement at some of the elite public schools, and whether it has gone too far. But opinions are divided - some parents see the "increasingly pressured atmosphere as antithetical to learning", while others are concerned "reforms would amount to a "dumbing down" of [their] children's education". See "New Jersey School District Eases Pressure on Students, Baring an Ethnic Divide", by Kyle Spencer (New York Times, Dec 25, 2015).

How do you feel that these concerns apply to Lexington?

This is a very serious concern and one that is certainly applicable to Lexington . I am deeply concerned about student stress here and have actively worked on this issue for many years. I was appointed by the School Committee to the Ad Hoc Committee for Youth At Risk, where I was a lead author of its report on student stress containing recommendations for schools, town and community. Some recommendations are already being considered: discussing homework,

competitive culture, continuity of K-12 social-emotional supports, late start time for LHS, honors-level alternatives to AP courses. There are things schools can do, but this is not just a school problem.

As parents, teachers, students and community members, we must have conversations about and dig deep into ourselves to understand what our priorities are, how we define success, and what balance we want for our children. There may be differing views on this, yet I don't think that defining it as an either/or serves us well. I do not believe that addressing stress and creating balance for students means "dumbing down" of their education. For example, by having teachers evaluate the value and purpose of homework, assignments can be focused on supporting learning goals and excess work can be reduced. This doesn't dumb down the curriculum, but rather enhances it. Other stress-reducing measures, such as looking into later start time for LHS, occasional homework-free days, or adding short breaks during the school day, might actually serve to help students' academic achievement.

We can have students be successful learners and reach high levels of potential as long as achievement alone is not the only measure of success for students. We need to attend to the social-emotional needs of students as well to maintain the health and well-being of our children.

10. Can you describe one issue which the School Committee handled very effectively over the past year? And one issue that could have been addressed better?

One issue which the School Committee handled very effectively was the expansion of extended day availability to Bridge School. It was an accomplishment that involved the collaboration of multiple parties – the School Committee, Superintendent, the elementary schools, the music program, the LexExtended Day program and others – to make it work. It is admirable when different groups work together to accomplish something that benefit students.

All candidates are asked to limit the response to each question to at most two or three paragraphs, and to provide the questionnaire responses by Sunday, Feb 7th, 2015. Responses will not be edited, and will run as submitted. They will be posted on lex-wiki.org in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire reviewer Vicki Blier. Questionnaire coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu (bitdribble@gmail.com, 617-216-8509).
