



Lex-Wiki.Org is a local Wikipedia for Lexington, MA. Lex-wiki.Org covers Arts and Entertainment, Local Flora and Fauna, Local History, City Life as well as Town Government and other issues of public interest in Lexington.

Name: Judy Crocker

Web Site Address: www.judycrockerforlexington.com

Phone: 781-863-9622

Email: rjcrocker@msn.com

Submission Date: 2/19/17

Biographical Question

1. *What can you tell us about yourself? Please include a brief outline of your relevant experience, including public offices held, and volunteer work.*

Along with my husband Rod, we are the proud parents of three Lexington graduates – Erin, Andrew, and Meghan, who are each currently in graduate school. We have lived in Lexington for 27 years. Prior to being a full-time mom, I worked as a board certified clinical laboratory supervisor for a regional reference laboratory at the West Roxbury Veteran’s Administration Medical Center and in Clinical Chemistry at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. I completed my MBA when my son was a toddler. When my youngest graduated from Harrington, the school offered me a stipend for three years in order to continue my Coordinator role in its Big Backyard program.

As a stay-at-home mom, for 25 years my energies have been focused on how my strategic and organizational planning skills can best move Lexington forward. Town roles have included Chair of Sidewalk Committee, ad hoc School Transportation and Safety Study Committee, and Safe Routes To School Coordinator; Transportation Safety Group; Town Meeting and Mock Town Meeting; Estabrook Task Force; No Idling Committee; and Permanent Building Committee new Harrington School rep. School Roles include PTA co-president; initiated five new PTA committees including Big Backyard, Family Math, Math

Mornings, co-author Harrington Builds School Improvement Plan, co-chair Harrington Moves; Harrington School Site Council community member; Lincoln-Douglas Debate board. Community roles include board member of William Diamond Jr Fife and Drum Corps and Hayden Synchronized Skating Teams; Lexington’s 300th; and it is my pleasure to volunteer for Lex Eat Together. I have earned 6 grants totaling nearly \$500,000 and have earned 4 awards, one national and three state, for my volunteer efforts.

Since 2014, it has been my honor to serve on the School Committee. I have been chosen by my colleagues to chair/co-chair three subcommittees (Policy, Finance, School Master Planning); I worked to hire and support Dr. Czajkowski; co-authored new policy and updated entire policy manual; Liaison to the Permanent Building, 20/20 Vision, Human Rights, and Superintendent’s Student Assignment Committees; helped to establish and support Lexington Coalition – Youth Initiative and Finance Subcommittee; participate in Collective Bargaining; and served on the Cary Memorial Library Board of Trustees.

Candidate Platform

2. Why are you running for the School Committee?

When my three children graduated from Lexington schools, I was ready to take my 25 years of school, municipal, and community experience and leadership skills to the next level. Education has always been a core value for my family. My father wrote his D.Ed dissertation on “Methods on Instructing Middle School Teachers How to Teach Science,” and so the joy of being a life-long learner was instilled early.

Three years ago, I had the honor of joining the School Committee and embarked on what has been a productive and gratifying journey. Working collaboratively with my colleagues, administration and staff, I have used my strategic planning skills to craft cost-effective and sustainable solutions for today’s issues. These include always placing student needs first; adding needed classroom space to all ten school buildings; developing an effective plan to address our school overcrowding at the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels; working to build resiliency and embrace cultural diversity so that it creates an environment where every child feels that they belong; using policy to provide flexibility for Dr. Czajkowski to make the most efficient use of every desk in every classroom; and doing all of this in a financially responsible manner while maintaining academic excellence.

There are still improvements to be made and this is why I continue to volunteer and advocate for our students. My goal is to continue my forward momentum and positive progress for another term in order to finish what I have begun. Some examples of work-in-progress involve when new Hastings opens, Lexington will need to be redistricted in order to efficiently fill its new classrooms. I view this as an opportunity to also implement another cultural change in our student's schedules with a later high school start time. This is why I have started the conversation now locally and with our neighboring communities. Other tasks include reviving project-based learning, revising the homework policy, working with peer communities to seek additional funding for METCO, exploring bringing legal counsel in-house, and seeing school improvements to the preschool and LHS come to fruition.

3. *What are your short-term and long-term priorities for the Lexington school system?*

My #1 Priority has always been that students come first. This may sound simple, but too often I have found that there is little emphasis spent on celebrating what our students and teachers are accomplishing everyday in the classroom. We must continue to make measurable strides in meeting the needs of the whole child, by embracing both academic and social-emotional learning. Long-term, this includes addressing stress, revising homework policy and instituting later high school start times, promoting exceptional faculty, using innovation and advanced pedagogy to expand our rich academic curriculum, and continuing to support the Lexington Coalition.

Fiscal responsibility is key in balancing Lexington's demands for school capital improvements while maintaining our academic excellence. Lexington is a community that embraces education, with 72% of the annual Town budget being dedicated to our students. I fully understand there are competing factors for any additional funding and so it is critical to demonstrate that every \$ is wisely spent for all students Prek-12. To this end, I am not shy about questioning a recommendation when I feel that there are other viable, lower cost solutions. Examples include co-authoring policy to give Dr. C the flexibility to more efficiently fill every desk in every classroom; my voting against purchasing 2014 elementary modulars or implementing a Fiske fifth grade 1.5 teacher model while there were multiple unused classrooms at Estabrook and before the School Committee had developed a long-term capital plan. In addition, a central School Committee responsibility is the school budget. Currently at more than \$100 million, I worked with my colleagues to create a School Committee Finance Subcommittee based on best practices of many peer communities to better oversee this role.

Educating children in appropriate learning environments is a long-term investment that benefits every child and taxpayer. Tackling enrollment and facilities demands will continue to be a School Committee priority. I support capital investments that replace buildings past

there lifespan using current low interest rates & state financing (Hastings and High School), additions & renovations to meet our needs (Clarke, Diamond, and 2017 elementary modulars), and a preschool plan that meets shared municipal & mandated educational needs for our youngest students. The creation of a Central Registry will improve our ability to enforce residency requirements and quantify student classroom placements by school and grade through earlier student registrations. The creation of the Enrollment Advisory Group brings in-house the volunteer work previously accomplished by the Enrollment Working Group as well as manages data obtained by the Central Registry. The way high school curriculum will be delivered until we secure added capacity and improved facilities is currently being explored through potential block scheduling changes, virtual and online classes.

Policy Questions

4. *How do you view the relationship between school spending, the quality of our schools in terms of teaching, programs and facilities, and the desirability of our community as a whole?*

Nationally, Lexington Public Schools is lauded as a top-ranked school system and a community that embraces education. 72% of the annual Town budget is dedicated to our students and this fiscal priority is the envy of many communities. Like my family, the Town’s educational reputation is the deciding factor for why many residents chose Lexington to raise their families and homes have consistently maintained stable property values. The Town’s high priority on education directly reflects on the quality of its public schools.

It is the prudent use of school funds, employing and retaining quality staff in concert with community engagement that make Lexington schools such a success. Central to quality schools is high performing teaching and learning by 1500 staff for our 7200 students. Quality administrators, faculty and staff require ongoing professional development and technology to stay abreast of improvements in pedagogy and upper level management position employment searches are sometimes promoted on the national level (superintendent, high school principal). School funds are used to maintain and expand the current level of academic excellence while recognizing and engaging the needs of the whole child. Every effort is made for those students who require additional educational resources through special education to meet their personal needs in their neighborhood school alongside their peers. Lexington has also been applauded for its efforts in closing the achievement gap and our School Committee has worked hard to prioritize class size, dedicated specialist spaces (art, music, ELL), and program equity among its school buildings. Our generous budget also pays for unfunded legal mandates without sacrificing programming.

An unintended consequence of Lexington’s public school reputation is PreK–12 overcrowding due to increased enrollment. In addition, some buildings have come to the end of their lifespan. Educating children in appropriate learning environments is a long-term investment that benefits every child and taxpayer. A school capital plan is underway to ensure that future generations of students continue to receive a rich and suitable classroom experience that maintains and promotes academic excellence.

5. *What is your view of the Lexington METCO program?*

For 50 years strong, METCO has been part of the fabric of Lexington and will continue to be into the future. Lexington’s program recently celebrated this milestone with two celebrations. Last spring, Lexington’s The Venue hosted a documentary viewing created by a Lexington, METCO alum. It showcased what the everyday and long-term benefits of the program have been for him and others and was followed by a panel discussion at the Depot. Last fall, a reception was also held in Boston. Both Lexington and Boston students benefit from this program. The School Committee holds one meeting annually in Boston as does the Hastings PTA.

Recently, a resident presented the School Committee with two position papers discussing the requirements of the law on which the METCO program is based and a program cost analysis. The School Committee with Dr. C engaged in robust and thoughtful conversations on these topics. It was determined by administration that while the data used in the paper was what was available to the author, the financial paper utilized incorrect assumptions in its calculations and that the real program expense was not near what was suggested.

Regarding the second paper on the Racial Imbalance Act, the take away is that an introspective look into the METCO program was suggested to ensure that the program is continuing to meet the needs of today’s students in ways that reach beyond curriculum. My colleagues and I discussed engaging other METCO communities experiencing rapid demographic changes similar to Lexington at the Massachusetts Association of School Communities annual Day on the Hill event at the State House this April. I have reached out to the organizers involved to hold such a caucus. Due to the increasing amount of time spent in traffic commuting to and from Boston, I also suggested that we explore a partnership to deliver WiFi on METCO buses in order for students to be able to complete homework on their school-issued iPads.

6. *What should Lexington do to improve existing programs or to bring new programs to our public schools? How would you fund these changes?*

Through professional development, administrators and faculty keep abreast of the latest trends in pedagogy along with the technology, materials, and methods to implement them. Lexington Learns is the pinnacle of our professional development program. Here, one assigned fall professional day is dedicated to nearly 140 different mini-workshops run and attended by the vast majority of Lexington’s staff. Topics range from teaching techniques, school subjects, and management topics to the sharing of LEF grant programming. This year, Dr. C included multiple sessions where faculty could provide feedback on what their view is and expectations of homework. Also, Dr. C working with the LEA union rep embrace peer mentoring and have begun a program called Classroom Walkthroughs, which work to improve teaching techniques via an informal critiquing process. Each of these improves existing programs at a nominal if any cost.

With the Town is in the midst of significant school and municipal capital improvement projects in combination with uncertain future federal and state funding, level-funded budgets are likely to be the new norm. Lexington Public Schools must look outside of its budget to advance new without sacrificing current programming. Untapped resources are forming corporate partnerships, the Community Center, and the wealth of experience found in our volunteer-centric community.

Partnerships to better meet student needs pair local businesses or entities with specific school needs. One example is to form a relationship with one of the many Boston-based computer companies to provide WIFI on METCO buses. An existing partnership pairs middle and high school students with the Town’s municipal mass transit system, Lexpress. The students benefit in having a late bus and Lexpress benefits by receiving half of their revenue come from the students. The Community Center would be a wonderful venue for a community living language laboratory or establishing an intergenerational mentoring programming for computer skills. Lexington could also share classes with Minuteman Tech High School, known for its biotechnology program. Lastly, in great part due to Lexington’s proximity to Boston and Cambridge, our community at-large consists of many professional residents who Nobel prize winners, college professors, health and engineering professionals. Engaging this wealth of expertise beyond judging for the LHS science fair has possibilities.

7. What are your thoughts on the current efforts to increase the resilience, health and well-being of our students and to decrease their academic and social stress?

I strongly support the need to build resiliency and to embrace cultural diversity in a way that creates an environment where every child feels that they belong to the LHS community, both social-emotionally and academically. Quantifiable data has been consistent and clear in the bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey and in many of its resultant recommendations have been implemented.

Recently, positive inroads have been achieved in recognizing, identifying, and implementing strategies to address the health and well-being of our students. Counseling Department (formerly called Guidance) has increased its number of counselors, social workers, and support staff. This is the first year that a mandated Student Risk Assessment has been implemented in Grade 9. It will be expanded to include middle school students. Middle schools have implemented ICE and WIN blocks, and LHS the I Block. These are all designed to allow students to seek extra help from teachers, use the gym or the library, or participate in enrichment activities as a way of addressing stress. The Lexington Coalition - Youth Initiative has made tremendous inroads in successfully getting stakeholders from the community as well as schools and municipal government to the table.

Education is key in modulating the level of expectation of academic rigor for students, parents, and staff. I have been an advocate for implementing later high school times, both with locally and regionally. As Chair of the Policy Subcommittee, Dr. C has begun gathering feedback to be used in revising the homework policy.

8. *Is the School Committee on the right track regarding school construction plans to address overcrowding? What changes, if any, would you like to see in regards to the school construction plans?*

Yes! In 2014, the Enrollment Working Group presented a new way to more accurately forecast Lexington's school enrollment. With this information, the School Committee created the ad hoc School Master Planning Committee which in January 2015 quantified that eight out of our nine school buildings were at or over capacity and that overcrowding is an issue at the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels. Not all of the Committee's recommendations were accepted, including right sizing some schools to levels that they have not seen in decades. I voted against a School Committee vote that would add elementary modulars in 2014 because there were multiple available classrooms for use at Estabrook and the School Committee at that time did not have a strategic capital plan. The Selectmen twice denied the School Committee this request for the very reasons I stated. Following this, working collaboratively with Selectmen, Facilities, Permanent Building and both finance committees, a plan was designed to assign priorities and address each of the four areas that need additional space capacity. During this time, the Armenian Sisters School and the Liberty Mutual properties became unexpected opportunities. The school capital plan adjusted to take advantage of the Armenian Sister School prospect of using a school as a school with a shared Community Center use. In concert, working with administration I co-authored policy which gave Dr. C the flexibility needed to efficiently use every desk in every classroom.

In the last three years, the town has added space to all ten school buildings. As a 3-year liaison to the Superintendent's Student Assignment Committee, working with a consultant

it successfully formulated multiple “surgical” redistricting areas that would affectively reduce enrollment at our most overcrowded elementary schools while using available desks at others, based on strict criteria including only being applicable to new, not existing, Lexington students. As the 3-year liaison to the Permanent Building Committee, I have helped to connect the dots in the multiple school project with School Committee goals; including class size, dedicated specialist space, and school parity.

Fiscally sound strategic planning involves looking at the big picture. The reality is that the students keep coming and that taxpayer contributions are finite. There are competing factors with municipal needs and there is only so much bandwidth that Facilities can manage. It is a manageable plan. Working with DiNisco Design, the plan has been recommended by Dr. C, staff, Permanent Building Committee and Facilities. It received approval from Selectmen and both finance committees. It successfully adds capacity to the preschool, elementary, middle and high school levels. If more capacity is needed in the near future, class size and specialist space may be compromised. For example, at the elementary level alone, there are 16 art and music classrooms.

9. Is the School Committee on the right track in regard to redistricting as a mechanism for optimizing use of elementary and middle school facilities?

Tools that give the Superintendent the flexibility and efficiency to fill every desk in every classroom have been successfully achieved through policy and maintain School Committee goals of classroom size, dedicated specialist space (art, music, ELL), and equitable programming between school buildings.

Such policies were successfully implemented this 2016-17 school year and classroom enrollment numbers demonstrate that such policies work. Less over-max elementary aides were used this year and class sizes among the six elementary and two middle schools were comparable. Surgical redistricting of new families to Lexington using policy based on strict criteria have occurred in high density areas for the purpose of relieving some of the overcrowding pressures at those schools most in need. As a 3-year liaison to the Superintendent’s Student Assignment Committee, the group worked with the consultant Applied Geo to set the parameters for and establish possible locations for such areas. Key is that the current policies affect only newly enrolled Lexington students who have never sat in a Lexington classroom.

Populations change over time and today Lexington experiences housing densities that have shifted the town’s population unevenly over its sixteen square miles. In addition, the capacity of our schools has been and continues to improve either through additions, renovations, or through rebuilding. In the last three years, the town has added space to all

ten school buildings. When the new Hastings comes on line, the entire town will need to be redistricted in order to appropriately fill its newly-built nine additional classrooms and further decompress some of our most populated schools.

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 end of day Sunday, Feb 19th, 2017. 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 coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu (bitdribble@gmail.com, 617-216-8509).
