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Submission Date: February 19, 2017

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.*

A product of the Lexington Public Schools, Class of 2009, I am the only candidate in the race that has the unique perspective of having experienced 21st Century learning. After graduation I went on to the University of Rhode Island where I received a B.A. *cum laude* in History with a Minor in Acting, while at the same time winning 4 Atlantic 10 Conference Team Championships with the Division 1 Track & Field Team. With a degree in hand, I went back to URI and completed a Master's Degree in Political Science. For the past three years I have served as the youngest member of Town Meeting. I also have volunteered with the 8th Grade Mock Town Meeting program, and served as the Recreation Department's Lightning Track coach for elementary age children.

Candidate Platform

2. *Why are you running for the School Committee?*

The reason I am running for School Committee is because I had a good education, the people of this town worked hard to make sure that was the case. Now I feel a responsibility to help provide the next generation with that same quality education. People in Lexington tell me that the younger generation should get involved in our Town. I believe I am answering that call. In fact, "Get Involved™" is the campaign slogan that I have chosen for this election, and I have trademarked that phrase because I firmly believe no community can properly govern

itself without an engaged and involved citizenry. My goal in standing for this seat is to pave the way for the next generation of leaders in Lexington.

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

Short Term:

Our school system prides itself on being on the cutting edge of education. However, I believe that we have fallen behind when it comes to embracing contemporary technology as a communication tool within the schools and the broader community. Changes such as updating school websites to have a uniform template for easier navigation; implementing social media to provide instant communication on what is going on within the school district; and creating a transparent process that is readily accessible to all those in Lexington who seek to get involved in our schools are needed.

Taking action to remove barriers to student driven success, specifically stress, needs to be a stronger focus of the School Committee. At the University of Rhode Island I excelled academically because URI empowered its students to take a leadership role in their education. This idea needs to be a stronger focus of the Lexington Public Schools. I believe some adults underestimate students' ability to understand external forces affecting their education. One way students could exercise responsibility is through High School orientation. I will advocate for a new orientation process for incoming freshmen. My vision involves graduating seniors and parents mentoring rising freshmen and parents. This would provide an opportunity for parents, whose children have attended LHS, to discuss with other parents the unique challenges their children will face. By empowering seniors to actively support incoming students, my belief is that freshmen will be better prepared for the stresses of LHS. They will also understand they are joining an encouraging community where students reach out to each other for the help that peers are in a perfect position to offer.

Long Term:

I will look to secure smart investments in school buildings. In Town Meeting our schools have been my top priority. I fully support doing what is necessary to provide our students, faculty and families with the best possible facilities. As a graduate of Hastings, I am pleased to see the wheels in motion to build a new school there and I fully support seeing it through to its completion. Moving forward I believe we need to create a comprehensive long term plan to address Bridge, Bowman, and LHS. Overspending takes a toll on the overall town budget and taxpayers, so it is critical that we wisely invest in these assets. My plan is to advocate for cost effective building designs that will solve the needs that these schools currently face, while being innovative and flexible enough to adapt to changing enrollment and 21st century learning.

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?*

Lexington prides itself on offering one of, if not the top public school educations in the country. The primary reason most families move to Lexington is the history of high quality education. If we as a community want to maintain that commitment to excellence it will come at a certain cost. I believe that we must be diligent in spending the taxpayers' dollars in a way that is efficient, and continues to provide long term improvements to our school programs and facilities.

Each year Town Meeting appropriates money for the programmatic needs of the schools. Of that over \$1,000,000 has been returned to the general fund annually for the last several years. That money could be used to fund curriculum such as elementary foreign language, a successful program that I experienced while at Hastings, which was lost due to a failed override over ten years ago. In the FY 2018 School Budget, the expense budget includes "very minor program improvements totaling \$17,780." I believe that the School Committee needs to recommit itself to utilizing the money it is appropriated to fund programs based on the global world into which today's students will graduate.

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

Lexington was one of the leaders in adopting the METCO program as a means of bringing diversity to the Lexington Public Schools, while at the same time providing children in underperforming districts with the chance to get a top level education. I believe METCO remains a valuable program for Lexington. The biggest barrier that students in the program continue to face is that they are not fully integrated into the Lexington Community. The main reason this is the case is the lack of transportation options. During my time in the Lexington Public Schools, I saw my friends from Boston, who had to wake up at 5am or earlier to get ready for school, exhausted by the time school began. By the time school ended they were completely worn out. This put them at a disadvantage trying to play catch up with their peers who easily got two or more additional hours of sleep. Additionally, it is difficult to engage METCO parents fully in what is going on with their children's education simply because of the distance. This is where embracing contemporary technology should come into play. With the utilization of social media as a communication tool, teachers and administration would be able to reach out to Boston parents to keep invested on their children's progress.

I believe that we must do more to make sure that METCO students do not feel like outsiders in their own schools. We need to find ways to allow METCO students to participate in before school programs, such as the select D-Minors choir at Diamond, because right now they do not arrive in Lexington to school by 7am when rehearsal starts. They do not have the ability to get an after school job in their school's community because the late late bus leaving at 6pm is the last

mode of transportation that the Lexington Public Schools provide. If a team gets back from a game after that late late bus leaves, it is often only by the good will of a teacher, coach or a friend’s parent that they are able to get home to Boston at night. I believe Lexington must provide the same opportunities as all Lexington students. We need engage members of the Lexington Community to do more to facilitate the full integration of METCO students, and increase the transportation that we provide to these students, so that they are afforded an equal educational experience.

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

When I was at Diamond, the Lexington Public Schools were ahead of the curve when it came to embracing 21st Century learning. What 21st Century learning focuses on is student collaboration, authentic learning experiences, and project based learning. Diamond dedicated an entire day of each week to this, aptly called “Project Day.” During that one day a week, the schedule was modified to allow for longer periods for students to work on a project based around one of the four core subjects, and each quarter the students would rotate in order to spend time on each subject throughout the year. The program was extremely successful as far as stimulating the critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration among the students. Unfortunately, since my time at Diamond, Project Day has been removed from the curriculum because it was not offered at Clarke. Rather than modifying the Clarke program to adopt this successful learning model, the project-based educational experience was discontinued. This decision should be re-examined.

As I stated in Question 4, over a \$1,000,000 per year that is appropriated for programs in the schools is returned to the general fund. I understand the concept of being fiscally responsible, and that just because you have the money does not mean you need to spend that money. However, the fact that the administration rejected project based learning because one school did not have the ability to offer it, and no one saw fit to offer the financial support to allow for Clarke to embrace it, speaks to a larger issue. Imagine telling a high performing student to dial back their efforts to excel because the other kids in class cannot keep up with that student. No one would accept that proposition, so why would we tell it to a school? My focus on the School Committee will be to serve the best interests of the students, and if I see that one school has raised the bar when it comes to education the children of this town, I would advocate for providing the Superintendent the resources to match that best practice across the grade levels.

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 believe some adults underestimate students’ ability to understand external forces affecting their education. In addition, it is not fair to look at one group or one demographic and label them as the sole source of student stress. The fact of the matter is that students today, more than ever before, understand the realities of how competitive the world has become and much of the stress they experience is self imposed. The Lexington Public Schools have always had a commitment to excellence that I believe is second to none. In recent years, this commitment has

begun to shift to demanding perfection from our students. The result of which is a student stress level that is out of control.

Mentoring can play a role in creating an encouraging community where students reach out to each other for support. I can remember what it was like seeing my friends taking four AP classes every year and putting an unhealthy amount of pressure on themselves to excel at the highest academic level. On the other hand, I remember seeing my friends who did not take any AP classes. They became so concerned with being viewed as inadequate by colleges that they poured on extra-curricular activities simply so they would be able to pad their resumes, and compete with students who out performed them in the classroom. I do not believe either one of these models is an appropriate way of getting the most out of your educational experience. The School Committee should take a proactive approach in sending a message to students and parents is that while the Harvards and Yales of the world offer tremendous opportunities, there is a wealth of great colleges in this country that can lead to extremely successful futures.

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?*

The issue of the overcrowding in the schools is one that is very personal to me, because I experienced it firsthand when modular classrooms were first added to Hastings in 1998. Those modular classrooms were only supposed to be a temporary solution to overcrowding, and here we are nearly 20 years later and still those same modular buildings, that I spent 2nd Grade in, are in use at Hastings. I believe the School Committee has been taking a reactionary approach to this problem for quite some time. Currently, there are websites that list the best school districts in a particular area, and then break it down by the schools and by what schools have been built most recently. Then property listings are provided in those particular school districts. What all this means is that there is a full scale network to funnel people from all over the country and all over the world into Estabrook, and as soon as it is complete Hastings. To take it one step further, by the time Hastings opens in Fall 2019 or Spring 2020 our enrollment estimates have shown that it will be nearly at maximum capacity. This fact sums up the overcrowding issue perfectly. The School Committee has designed a plan for a new school, received MSBA approval for 30% of the funding for that school, the project has not even broken ground yet and we know the building will not be an adequate solution for our future space needs or provide for changing teaching methods.

My solution is to no longer look at school building projects in a vacuum. We need a comprehensive plan for how to tackle overcrowding in our school system. This means when we create a plan for Bowan, Bridge and LHS we plan buildings that will be flexible enough to adapt to changes in enrollment and education over the next quarter century. In addition, we need to stagger the rebuild and design for each. In doing so, this will allow us to modify the plans for the next capital project in light the problems the previous one did or did not address.

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?*

As I mentioned in question 8, there are systems in place online that are funneling students from all over the world into the newest schools. Redistricting certainly will play a role in optimizing the use of elementary and middle school facilities, but I do not agree with hand picking children from specific neighborhoods and displacing them from their friends. When I was in college my favorite History Professor had taught at URI for nearly 50 years. He explained to me that 90% of what you learn in life takes place outside of the classroom. Lexington has a strong history of community and education, and I firmly believe that children who live in the same neighborhood, and spend their time outside of school learning together, should go to the same school.

When Hastings reopened in 1994, the town did a broad based investigation of the best practices to pick the model of schooling that would most effectively support learning and community. They looked at models including an early childhood center, an all kindergarten school , a math or other curriculum focused school(s), and multiple ways of placing students. At that time the neighborhood school model proved once again to foster community and excellence for Lexington. Nothing that I have seen since that has changed these conclusions. The current problem of school enrollment is the result of years of short-sighted reactive policy on overcrowding. I do not believe we should be stifling the growth of our children and the bonding of neighborhood families in an attempt to remedy the lack of planning by previous administrations. Instead, the School Committee should work with the planning board to understand future development possibilities, and develop strategies to maintain the long standing neighborhood school concept.

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).
