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Submission Date: October 10, 2014

Biographical Questions

- 1. Please include a brief biography outlining relevant experience, including public offices held, public boards and/or committees, and your volunteer experience in Lexington schools.**

As an LPS parent, I experienced my children benefit from an LPS education. I have more than 35 years experience as an educator, including the positions of school psychologist, teacher, director of special education, principal, assistant superintendent and 14 years as a superintendent (Marshfield, Sudbury, interim in Lexington). After retiring, my passion for serving public education remained strong. I mentored superintendents and principals and consulted and made presentations to school committees and superintendents in Massachusetts on the topic of High Performance Team Building. As a Fellow at Boston College from 2008-2012 I did similar training for administrators. For two years I taught post Masters graduate level courses to aspiring administrators on the topics of Learning Theories and Supervision and Evaluation. Since 1997, when appointed by the Commissioner of Education, I have served on the Department of Education Panel for Alternative Certification for applicants seeking certification as superintendent, principal, and other administrative and mental health positions.

Nine years ago the Lexington Town Moderator appointed me to Capital Expenditures Committee where I had served for three –plus terms, resigning recently from my fourth term to run for school committee. I held additional liaison roles to the ad hoc School Master Planning Committee and ad hoc facilities committee. Many years ago I coached youth baseball, soccer and hockey, serving on the Board of Youth Baseball and Hockey. I have been a member of Director of Committees at Sacred Heart and St. Brigid Parish, and currently am a volunteer at Youville Place.

I believe these experiences speak to my broad based experience as an educational leader and commitment to the town my wife and I have gratefully called home since 1975.

- 2. Why are you running for the School Committee? What qualities would you bring, and what is your leadership style?**

My wife Carol and I moved to Lexington in 1975 and raised my family here. My two children, now adults, received a fine education from LPS. Lexington has been very good to my family and me. I am running for SC to give back in the best way that I can to the community that has given me and my family so much for which we are grateful.

My style is that of a collaborator, leader, and team builder. I have trained school committees and superintendents to work as high performance teams and want to share this with Lexington's School Committee. Being a collaborator and team builder requires open and transparent participation from all constituents. This is often very challenging, but it will help provide confidence in school committee leadership and ultimately benefit the students in our school system. I am decisive, but not divisive. I encourage a range of ideas and options, and, after careful, respectful, and due consideration, am resolute in decision-making.

Candidate Platform

3. Please describe your top two priorities, if elected, and how you plan to achieve them.

In order for Lexington to maintain and continue its excellence as a school system we need to assure that the teaching/learning process continues to be our primary focus. There are times when urgent priorities must be addressed to make this happen. Current topics of urgency, and priorities for me as a member of the School Committee, include selecting the right person to be the next superintendent and crafting a plan to provide needed instructional space for increasing enrollment. My approach to both of these incorporates the lessons I have learned in 35+ years of education, including fourteen years as a superintendent.

Whether it is in a classroom, art room, gymnasium, outdoor science walk, or chemistry lab, the core of Lexington's success is in what transpires between teachers and students. Students are at the center of our decision-making. Today's students are under more pressure than ever. While we want to keep high-standards, we must take steps to best serve their emotional and social growth as well. Areas I intend to evaluate and address include homework, school start time, course levels, time for physical activity, and appropriate use of assessments. Each of these will require collaboration among administration, staff and families.

Policy Questions

4. What do you think should be done, both short-term and long-term, for managing our town-wide student overcrowding problem? How should Lexington budget for the necessary construction costs?

What is obvious to all is that we need more space now. Many options have been discussed by the school committee and others in public in recent weeks. I agree that all of these need to be considered.

In the short term, we need to provide additional space to alleviate overcrowding at Bridge and Bowman. Fiske has one grade that is over the guidelines but within the contractual language. Although redistricting on a partial basis (meaning before there is a long term plan) is less than ideal, it may be necessary, depending on where increased enrollment occurs next year.

Another option is to provide portable space where needed, not to accommodate more students, but to give relief to the present use of space. Longer term than 1 to 2 years, I believe, will require additional classrooms somewhere. We are waiting to hear back from the state on whether or not we will receive state funding for a new or renovated Hastings. However the state responds to this request, we likely will need additional classrooms added to one or more schools. This could take the form of new wings or pre-fab additions. Budgeting can address short term leasing of portable spaces and costs associated with redistricting. Building wings and/or a new or renovated Hastings will require a debt exemption override.

5. The School Committee is in process of hiring a new School Superintendent. How would you summarize what Lexington needs in a Superintendent?

Lexington needs a person with the skills and personal integrity to lead the school system as it faces many challenges. This will require a person who can set prioritized goals, develop responsible budgets, work effectively with a school committee, staff, students, town departments and all constituent groups. Because Lexington is a high performing district and the parent population has high expectations, s/he must be an active listener, open to opposing points of view, and able to make difficult decisions in the best interest of all students. The candidate must embrace a culturally diverse community and promote diversity within the hiring of staff.

It is important that the superintendent exemplifies the personal as well as professional qualities we look for in all our staff and wish for in our children. It is a given that the candidate will possess the skills, knowledge, and experience required of an educational leader for a community such as Lexington. Above all, we need someone with an ability to reach out to all people of good will to enhance our communal effort to provide the best education possible for all our students in a working environment that demonstrates respect for all educators.

6. How can School department personnel develop improved communications and work relationships with municipal staff?

I know firsthand that open communication and respectful work relationships with other municipal departments can and should be natural and fruitful. Because, while Interim Superintendent in Lexington, I worked collaboratively and cooperatively with all municipal departments especially the Town Manager's Office, Police, Fire, DPW and Recreation. The open communication I had with all of these is one that I consider to be essential for the school district and community at large.

We were able to do this because of the mutual respect we had for each others' responsibilities and for all constituent groups in Lexington. I would seek and hold accountable a new superintendent to interact with his or her municipal counterparts in a similar fashion.

7. What is your view of the traffic and safety of children at pick up and drop off time at all of our Lexington schools?

Schools are about teaching and learning in a safe environment. School drop off and pick up has improved in the last few years as more children are riding the bus, which means less traffic in and out of the schools. There is policy and new collaboration in place to provide for continued improvements in student safety.

I hope everyone will continue to support the Safe Routes to School program, which has encouraged walking, and other non-motorized means of getting to school. This is also great for physical fitness, can help put children in a positive state to learn when they arrive at school, and helps streamline traffic on the roads and near our school buildings. The School Committee and School Department have made improvements over the last 3 years, including increased bus routes and ridership, new busing options to help transport children from elementary schools to after-school programs. In addition, the schools are partnering with Lexpress to provide after school transportation for middle and high school students.

Beyond these improvements, a few next steps include increased driver education to make sure students are never put at risk by drivers, ongoing efforts to improve signage so that all of our schools have a common visual vocabulary, and ongoing collaboration with the Police Department to become more consistent about enforcing school policies.

8. Do you support the reintroduction of Foreign Languages instruction in Lexington elementary schools? In what grade should Foreign Languages instruction start?

Yes, I believe LPS should offer foreign language study in the elementary schools. Teaching students a foreign language strengthens memory, listening and critical thinking skills, and teaches tolerance and a global perspective. Additionally, I believe that the benefits of starting as early as kindergarten when young minds are incredibly receptive to learning and continuing, uninterrupted, through high school is the best way to ensure proficiency in the chosen language. To do this well, we need to plan budgeting and curriculum content, select the language(s) to be taught, establish scheduling, and provide adequate classroom space. These factors will determine when and at what grades we introduce other languages into elementary schools. Ideally, we would want to offer language in all elementary grades or at least provide for all grades within a two-year period once initiated.

9. Many Lexington elementary school students are signed up for external math tutoring services – the Russian School of Math, Kumon, Chinese School math classes, etc. In your opinion, why do parents feel the need to sign up elementary school students to out-of-school math classes, and what can be done to bring the styles of elementary school math encountered in school and at tutoring services more in concert?

Historically parents have been frustrated by the fact that their children are taught math differently than they had been. The trend in the last 25 years has moved from a heavy emphasis on computation and formulas to word problems and critical thinking skills. Feedback I've received includes a desire of parents to have their children excel beyond what the current curriculum provides. Many have acknowledged their desire to have their children best prepared for acceptance into elite schools.

Enrichment math has become the new standard for getting ahead. More and more parents feel compelled to provide additional math experiences thereby continually raising the bar and stress level for even the youngest children.

Enrichment math has created a greater range of math needs in the classroom. The result is, teachers are stressed in trying to meet all student needs in a non-differentiated environment. The affordability and time consumption of these programs are family stressors. One solution is to provide differentiated math at the youngest levels, perhaps starting at grade 3. For children who need additional remediation, as opposed to enrichment, I would seek in-house alternatives that might be employed as well as a careful review of the content material.

10. What is your view of the effectiveness of the science curriculum in Lexington schools?

We need our science curriculum to serve all students at all levels. Based on the most recent MCAS results, Lexington is doing well very compared to statewide results. In elementary schools, positive contributions in conjunction with PTA based programs such as Big Back Yard, Engineering is Elementary, and Science Fairs enhance the curriculum. Feedback from parents regarding middle school science suggests that improving coordination between the middle and

high school science curriculum could help ensure more continuity, better preparation, and an easier transition for students.

At the high school, faculty sponsored clubs, such as the Phage and Phylogenetic Tree Clubs are highly respected. However, there is a need to reevaluate how our science courses are leveled to meet all students' needs. We need more hands on opportunities as well as an Honors level course. When discussing stress, part of the conversation should include the pros and cons of having no introductory science course, for Lexington sophomores. AP biology is a first year biology course for sophomores and exceedingly challenging for students having had no prior introduction to the subject.

- 11. At the High School, when signing up for the 10th grade AP Biology class and the 11th grade AP Chemistry class, students are asked to prepare independently on the subject in the summer before the start of class, in order to be ready to handle some of the AP class material. What should the High School do to ensure that summer preparatory work is not needed, or that it is done part of regular course work during the school year?**

Given the current structure of the sequencing of the high school science curriculum, it is inevitable that students will be asked to work independently on some schoolwork over the summer. I will ask the SC and administration to review the science curriculum and consider restructuring the leveling of courses. I would also be interested in pursuing the potential of our providing a summer prep class if and where needed.

- 12. With the advent of standardized tests and the MCAS, how should Lexington schools ensure that 'teaching to the test' is avoided, and that school subjects not tested on the MCAS are not losing instructional time to disciplines like math and English that are tested by the MCAS?**

I firmly believe that if our teachers teach the approved Lexington curricula there should be no reason to fixate on MCAS. We have traditionally invested time for our teachers and department leaders to develop units of study that meet the Massachusetts Frameworks and then go beyond to incorporate more creative or innovative area. While I do not think we need to or should teach to the test, it is appropriate to have students experience a sampling of the test before they take the test. It helps reduce anxiety to be familiar with the format. I do not support excessive practice testing. As the PARCC test is under discussion, I know that Lexington piloted the test last year to make sure we would be prepared if the state requires a shift. I am pleased that the School Committee and administration agreed to return to MCAS this year since the PARCC test is really still in need of improvements and, at this stage of the test development, our teachers do not receive any information from the test that would help them support student learning. With MCAS tests, our teachers do receive meaningful information. As a Superintendent, I always had our teachers perform item analysis to find common themes in test results so we could adjust instructional strategies when needed. I am told we do this in Lexington as well, and I believe it is an excellent strategy to make sure MCAS is working for our students.

- 13. Is the school technology base (interactive whiteboard, iPads, learning software, computer hardware, WiFi networking) provided for adequately in Lexington schools? What technology devices, specifically, do you consider useful for the classrooms, and why?**

Any new technologies require effective professional development for staff to utilize effectively. As a member of the Capital Expenditures Committee we vetted each technology proposal to ensure that the expenditures made sense from the taxpayer perspective, and I have supported every technology proposal. In recent years our community has been very generous in supporting the technology plan so that we do not fall behind other communities in the Commonwealth. As a former educator and administrator I not only fully support our technology plan, but also look for assurance that as we plan and implement technologies all students have equal access.

- 14. What should be ideal class sizes in our elementary and middle schools, and at the high school? Are Lexington school facilities adequate at this time to accommodate the School Committee's own guidelines for class sizes?**

There is no ideal number for class size. Lexington guidelines are appropriate. It would be great if all Lexington classes could be at the lower end of the class size range according to the committee guidelines and teachers' contract. The problem is having enough space to meet the current guidelines. Given the rapid enrollment growth Lexington is experiencing it is fortunate that the situation is not worse. I acknowledge that is little comfort to parents in larger class sizes or schools where there is a general crowding of spaces. The reality is that our current facilities do not provide adequate space. Redistricting can alleviate some pressure points, but does not solve the need for additional space now or in the near future.

- 15. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. Lexington school start times are 8:30/8:00/7:30 a.m. for elementary/middle/high school. What should Lexington do about schools start time.**

School start times as it relates to sleep deprivation is a real issue for our students and we need to give it serious consideration. There are obstacles that need to be resolved before we can move forward on this. The SC decisions should be based on what is best for all students in the short and long term. In this case, we need to work out and work through the issues keeping us from what we know to be true and best for our children based on scientific evidence. If we can do that, then we could move ahead. Other districts have made adjustments. To do this well and wisely we need to know what time configurations work best for students at other grade levels as well. We also need to determine how we manage after school activities and assure that we take other issues such as time and coordination of homework for all courses into consideration. The purpose of changing start times is to help students be more productive learners to start the day. They will still need adequate quality sleep time to realize maximum value from this time shift.

- 16. With the exception of lunch break, the duration of recess at the middle schools and at the high school is 5 minutes. At some of the elementary schools, one 15 minutes recess is observed in addition to lunch break. Do you think recess length, at the middle schools and the high school, and recess frequency at the elementary schools are adequate? If not, what could the School Committee do to address this.**

Research says that physical activity and recess are important to learning. School Committee policy calls for "vigorous" exercise of students. Schools must find ways to further incorporate activity in the school day. Recess time should never be taken away from any student and no school should disallow running during recess. The SC and LPS administration need to look at options to provide time for maximize recess. Some obstacles are, among others, mandated hours of learning and contractual length of school day. However, administration will need to collaborate with all stakeholders to solve this problem.

- 17. Over the last year, can you describe one issue which the School Committee handled very effectively? And one issue that could have been addressed better?**

Handled effectively: From the time Dr. Ash announced his retirement, the School Committee quickly came to consensus around the search process for the next superintendent. They determined that it would be necessary to turn to a professional search firm, and developed a well-organized Request for Proposals. Four vendors were interviewed in public, and they selected a national firm that presented a thorough search process. They have planned to make each step transparent with open focus groups & two community forums . The survey might have had more participants, but overall the School Committee has acted quickly and decisively.

Could be better handled: Inviting input from parents earlier in the budget process would be welcomed by parents and potentially helpful to the school committee and administration in preparing the annual budget. At a recent school committee meeting I heard a parent PTA rep speak to the financial contributions they made last year to supply teachers with what we would consider to be ordinary operating supplies for a classroom. Items described included cleaning materials and other basic utilities. These expenditures should be adequately funded in the operating budget so that parents' efforts are in the area of enrichment, not normal every day household expenses.

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 Friday, Oct 10th. 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). Questionnaire reviewer: Deb Mauger.