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## 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.*

My interest in public education started in college, where I combined a History major with a teacher education program. After college I was a public high school history teacher. I taught students at all levels, including an AP class. My experience as a teacher shaped my appreciation for the challenges all teachers and schools face.

After moving to Lexington in 2000, I quickly became involved in the community. As a Bowman parent, I progressed from organizing Staff Appreciation week and the METCO Family and Friends program, to becoming a PTA president in 2009. I followed this pattern as my children arrived at Clarke and LHS, becoming involved in each school and serving as the PTO president at Clarke and LHS.

### Lexington School Experience

- LHS PTO, Co-President, 2015-present
- Clarke PTO, Co-President, 2012-2014
- Bowman PTA, Co-President, 2009-2011
- LPS Redistricting Committee, 2006-2007
- Clarke Principal Search Committee, 2012
- LPS Student Assignment Committee, 2016-Present

Town Government/Town Volunteer

- Town Meeting Member, Precinct 4, 2014-present
- Lexington Youth Coalition, Steering Committee, 2015-present
- Co-Chair, Yes For Lexington campaign, 2016

## Candidate Platform

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

Education has been a passion of mine for my entire adult life. From my days as a high school history teacher to serving our schools and town in a variety of volunteer roles, I have gained a deep knowledge of the issues facing our students and schools. I want to put this experience to work serving our teachers, students, and community members on the School Committee.

Lexington is fortunate to have some of the best schools in the country. Our teachers and staff are dedicated, our parents are engaged, and we have the resources to ensure that our children receive the best education possible. But we can do better. Too many of our students view school not as a place to pursue knowledge and explore exciting new subjects, but as something to endure. As a School Committee member, I want to focus the energy of the committee on addressing the issue of pervasive student stress and help bring about a renewed commitment to create an educational environment that fosters a love of learning.

Given that this is a one year term, we need someone who can immediately step into this role with a keen understanding of the challenges facing our schools. I believe my extensive experience as a leader in school organizations and my participation in town government has given me the tools to be an effective member of the School Committee from day one.

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

My priorities as a School Committee member will be to address the need for increased capacity at our schools and to take action to reduce student stress. With projections of continued increases in enrollment at the elementary level, we need to focus on how we can provide adequate space for our young students. We also cannot forget that those children will make their way to the high school. At the current enrollment, LHS is already crowded. By the 2021-22 school year, the projected enrollment is expected to increase by almost 200 students. We need to start planning now for the additional space necessary for LHS to meet the needs of future students.

Beyond meeting infrastructure needs, the most important step our schools can take to help students is to maintain a real and sustained focus on the issue of student stress. It is not enough to teach stress management – we need to reduce the amount of stress students face. We have elementary students suffering from unnecessary anxiety over standardized tests, middle school students worried about how 7th grade math will affect them in high school, and high school students overwhelmed

with academic demands. If elected, I will focus the energy of the School Committee on this important issue.

## Policy Questions

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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?*

With an approximate per pupil expenditure of just over \$17,000 per year and the school budget representing approximately 70% of the total town revenues, it is only right that citizens want to know what we are getting for this massive financial commitment. Some people may wonder if the town is spending lavishly on education. It is not. It is simply not possible to have amazing teachers, a rich assortment of education programs and a continued push for new and renovated school facilities without significant spending.

A teacher at Bowman once commented to me that in her town there is one reading specialist for three elementary schools. In Lexington, we have three reading specialists for one elementary school. This allows us to quickly and effectively help students who are struggling, students who would almost certainly not get this kind of small group or one on one help at other schools. This is only possible because of the generous funding of our schools.

Of course, the desirability of our community goes beyond the resources provided to our schools. We have active and engaged parents, students who arrive at school ready to learn and an entire community that takes pride in education. We are truly fortunate to live in a town that takes its commitment to education seriously and is prepared to devote a large percentage of its financial resources to our children.

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

It is a source of pride that Lexington is one of the original communities to participate in METCO. This is a program that benefits both students from Boston as well as students here in Lexington. With three children who have participated in our METCO Family Friends program, I have seen firsthand how this program enables friendships and opportunities for children to learn from each other.

We hear occasional rumblings from some Lexington residents that we should reconsider our participation in this program as a way to reduce our operating expenses and need for additional classroom space. These concerns were addressed and rebutted at the Dec. 20, 2016 School Committee meeting. It is certainly true that we would welcome additional state funding for METCO, but there is no question that the METCO program is tightly integrated into the Lexington community and our commitment to it should not waver.

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

The key to improving programs and bringing back new programs is listening. We need to solicit the input of the teachers, staff, administrators and parents about what is working, what is not, and what new programs are needed. An excellent example of this is the push to bring back foreign language instruction to the elementary level. From the moment it was lost in a failed override, we knew that we had made a mistake. Thanks to the diligence of the School Committee, administrators, and members of the community we have a plan for how we can implement a new language program for our youngest students.

The tricky part, of course, is how do fund these changes. We are already facing budget pressures due to the increase in student enrollment, as a 1% increase in enrollment necessitates the hiring of 14 full time employees. We need to take a hard look at our budget and make certain that it reflects our educational priorities. It is imperative to make the best choices for our students, and if that results in an increased budget, the School Committee must be prepared to defend those choices.

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?*

There has been encouraging progress in the past two years in the effort to address the health and wellbeing of our students as we have seen the implementation of concrete measures to not just help students manage stress, but reduce the amount of stress they face. Middle and high school students now have time built into their schedules when they can meet with teachers for enrichment, get extra help and make up assignments. The no written homework pilot program at Estabrook this year is another example of our schools moving beyond only talking about stress and instead taking action.

While these developments are a start, we need to remain focused on this important issue and keep moving forward. Big change is the most difficult to implement, but I want us to think big. One such idea is examining the science curriculum at LHS. Our high school is out of step with its peer schools in that it asks students to take AP science classes without the benefit of an introductory class. Another is changing the high school start time so students can start the day with adequate rest. Making such changes will not be easy or quick, but these are the kind of changes that will have a meaningful positive impact on students.

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 construction of a new and enlarged Hastings is an essential component to addressing our space needs for the elementary level. The addition of 9 classrooms will provide some relief to our crowded schools, but it is important to remember that our enrollment numbers are not projected to remain

static during the next 3 years before Hastings is scheduled to open. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that by 2020 the 9 new classrooms will be filled by students new to Lexington. If this is the case, our elementary schools may not be more crowded than they are currently, but we will not be able to provide real relief to schools like Bowman and Bridge. If the School Committee is truly committed to right sizing these schools, we will need a plan for more space at the elementary level beyond what we will gain with the new Hastings.

The School Committee needs to focus on a plan for new LHS. There is no question it needs to be replaced, either all at once or building by building. It is crowded, outdated and the HVAC system is in dire need of replacement. While it is understandable the focus of the School Committee has been on the elementary and middle schools, those students will be at LHS in just a few years. We need to start planning for the SOI to be submitted to the MSBA as soon as possible. However, the new LHS is many years away and a long term project. We also need a short term plan to accommodate the enrollment crunch that will affect LHS in next five years. With over 600 6th graders and 600 7th graders, LHS is projected to over 2400 students in the 2021-22 school year. We need a plan for how we will create the space needed for these students.

*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?*

The School Committee’s adoption of a buffer zone policy is an important step towards optimizing our enrollment numbers in our crowded elementary and middle schools. While Lexington has long used the neighborhood school system of student assignment, the pressure of rising enrollment makes that unsustainable. The small redistricting that the School Committee enacted last year proved that moving a relatively small number of families new to the LPS can result in a more equitable distribution of students system wide.

The decision to wait to implement buffer zones until the completion of Hastings and allow Dr. Czajkowski was also a wise decision. Thus far, we have been able to smooth out enrollment at our elementary and middle schools with adjustments to school assignments of families new to Lexington. With the addition of 9 classrooms to the new Hastings, we will need a much more comprehensive redistricting, like the one in 2006, to maximize the use of our newest school and provide relief to the other elementary schools. This is the point at which it makes sense to fully implement the buffer zone policy, as a component of a major redistricting.

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*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](http://lex-wiki.org) in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu ([bitdribble@gmail.com](mailto:bitdribble@gmail.com), 617-216-8509).*

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