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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?*

As a faculty member at the Harvard Medical School with a laboratory at Massachusetts General Hospital, and as an Associate Director of Pediatric Surgical Research Laboratories, I have taught and trained students and fellows from all over the world. I understand firsthand why a quality education matters. Our world is increasingly global; our children's future will be even more so. A forward-looking education is one that instills critical as well as creative thinking, communication skills, and a depth of cultural understanding. For me, that means championing not only math and science, but also languages and the arts. I will advocate for programs that are the most vulnerable in difficult economic times because each is essential to a full and enriching education.

Candidate Platform

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

Our parents, students, and all citizens justifiably take pride in the well-recognized excellence of our schools. At the same time, there are many challenges that will require sound governance, collaboration, and the support of all our townspeople as we launch much-needed building projects without sacrificing our excellent academic programs. I believe that

my 6 years of experience, which has included the construction of a new Estabrook Elementary School, is a big advantage given the issues that we will face in the near future.

Addressing increased student enrollment and our upcoming capital needs, implementing policies and programs to reduce student stress, maintaining thriving academic programs, and continuing to improve the Special Education environment are just a few of the tasks I intend to continue to work on in my next term on the School Committee. With all of this in mind, and from the perspective of a candidate who is a working parent with a child in the school system, I seek re-election to the Lexington School Committee.

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

- 1. To work collaboratively and intelligently with our new Superintendent, Dr. Mary Czajkowski, and to ensure that she can successfully implement our shared vision of the Lexington School System
- 2. To address increased student enrollment and upcoming capital needs
- 3. To assess and increase community awareness of student stress

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?*

a) School Committee members are required by state law to undergo training provided by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to understand the relationship between the School Committee and the Superintendent. The following are the recommendations from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Educations (DESE) as described at the MASC training for new School Committee members and listed in the DESE section of "Education Laws and Regulation, Advisory on School Governance:"

"The superintendent serves as the school committee's chief executive officer and educational advisor. The superintendent is the educational leader for the school system, and provides administrative leadership for all school staff in operational matters and in proposing and implementing policy changes. Day-to-day operation of the school system is the responsibility of the superintendent, together with school principals and other administrative staff members.

The board is a legislative body that develops, evaluates, and oversees education policies. The superintendent is the professional educator chosen by the board to implement policies and to provide professional leadership for a district's schools. With such vital responsibilities, a sense of teamwork is essential."

Boundaries between the School Committee and the Superintendent are clearly stated. The School Committee defines the educational goals and policies for the school district. It hires the Superintendent to implement those policies and run the day-to-day operations. It evaluates the Superintendent on his or her effectiveness in implementing those goals and policies.

With regard to finances, it is the Superintendent who proposes a school district's budget. The School Committee then reviews and approves it based on established plans and objectives. Because school districts are multifaceted, it is essential that the responsibilities of the School Committee and the Superintendent are clearly understood and mutually respected in order for governance to be effective on behalf of the students, staff, administrators, and the community.

b) The School Committee under no circumstances may interfere with or direct staff. All questions must be directed through the Superintendent or their designee.

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?*

Yes. With regard to the middle schools, it is imperative that we renovate and expand both Diamond and Clarke Middle Schools because doing so will allow maximum flexibility when we redistrict town-wide. It will also help ease the projected increase in enrollment at the middle schools. With regard to the plans for the elementary schools, we were fortunate to receive MSBA state funding for the second time in the last five years to help with the construction of a new Hastings Elementary School. However, building a new school at Hastings will not be enough to alleviate the overcrowding at our elementary schools district-wide. Recently the School Committee approved a study to look at a possible brick-and-mortar addition at Harrington with the hope of creating enough classrooms in addition to the new Hastings. However, we must remain cognizant of the burden such construction costs would have on our taxpayers.

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?*

This is a complex question because it is asking our citizens to think about our desperately needed infrastructure investments versus increasing their property tax. The success of any capital debt exclusion override will require a campaign to educate the public on the need for that debt exclusion. It is imperative to listen to all voices in this decision. At least twenty percent of Lexington residents will be highly impacted by the increase in their property taxes. My hope is that the town will be able to support these requests. With respect to past school debt exclusions or overrides, I have supported all of them since we moved here to Lexington in 1997.

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

Yes, we should because not only do we live in a multi-lingual world, but many studies have shown that teaching world languages to children early on helps with cognitive development, improving critical thinking and the creative process. I envision a world language program that could be integrated with other disciplines. Language study can also serve as an invaluable introduction to other cultures, broadening our children's horizons, increasing mutual understanding and respect between different parts of the world. At this point, we are advocating an examination of what a program at the elementary level would look like, and what associated costs and effects it would have on the school schedule. Only then, after we have a concrete proposal, would we be able to take it to the voters for their review, consideration, and potential approval.

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

The answer to this depends on how we define "academic excellence." In other words, do we want our school district to have programs that are geared toward focusing on the achievement of a specific subset of students while others fall by the wayside or do we want our educational goal to focus on the whole child, allowing them to explore their passion and recognizing, as Howard Gardner states, that there are multiple intelligences. I believe that a redefinition of academic excellence in Lexington is necessary and must reflect the multiple intelligences that exist in our school system—from the sciences to mathematics to the arts.

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?

The School Committee should provide the necessary leadership to establish and implement plans of action to reduce stress levels in the Lexington Public Schools. This can come in the form of arts advocacy (visual, musical, theatrical, literary), or working to preserve world languages and athletic programs. Education professor Howard Gardner posits that there are "multiple intelligences." If we were to eliminate programs that some students naturally excel at and have a passion for, we send the unfortunate message that these interests are not as meaningful to society as reading, writing, and math. Six years ago, when I was concerned about the levels of drug and alcohol abuse, unreported suicide attempts, and other byproducts of stress in our town, I co-founded Lexington Youth and Family Services. Two years ago, I co-established the ad hoc Committee on Youth at Risk. Perhaps we need to redefine success and understand that helping our students achieve their potential is a better and healthier goal, and that this does not necessarily mean "dumbing down" a child's education.

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 we have handled very effectively was the unanimous hiring of the new Superintendent, Dr. Mary Czajkowski. She brings with her an emotional intelligence that is especially needed as we move forward to reach out to the community to garner support for our academic programs and current and future capital needs. In addition, she understands that we must tackle the problem of student stress and to help bring back the joy of learning. She understands that we must support our teachers despite the constant barrage of standardized testing requirements and teacher assessments.

One issue that could have been addressed better was the path to the capital building plan. It took far longer than necessary. The delayed approval of the six modular units for Bowman, Bridge, and Fiske resulted in increased capacity pressures at Bowman and Bridge and the loss of the art room at Fiske.

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).
