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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 service in Lexington schools.*

My career as an educator includes more than thirty five years as teacher, psychologist principal, Special Education Director, and 14 years as superintendent, including 1 year as interim Superintendent of Lexington, and adjunct professor for post masters courses.

In the 1980's I was appointed by the then school committee to a committee to study and recommend future school closings (we recommend to not close any more schools). In 2009 I was again appointed by the school committee to again study future school facilities. The Estabrook PCBs trumped any other need for immediate construction. After completing my interim year as superintendent in 2005, the Town Moderator appointed me to the Capital Expenditure Committee to which I was reappointed for three more 3 year terms. I resigned that position this summer when I announced my candidacy for the November election to the School Committee. Presently I am the co-chair of the Ad Hoc Master Planning Committee and school committee liaison to CEC and the TMMA Executive Board.

Candidate Platform

2. Why are you running for School Committee?

The most pressing challenges for the school committee this year are the selection and preparation for transition of leadership in superintendent position and the decisions to how best responsibly address the increase in student enrollment in the past five years anticipated to continue for at least the next five years. My experience in all aspects of school operations and policies to address those needs match the very experiences in my long career as an educator and school volunteer referenced above. I am seeking reelection to continue the collaborative work of the school committee that we've begun to address in my three months on the committee.

During the negotiations with the newly elected superintendent, I was the point person with whom all the parties communicated to keep information clear and consistent. As a result we agreed on a contract in a timely fashion with full agreement of all involved. It has established a climate of trust between the superintendent and committee.

3. What do you believe are the priorities for our schools in the short-term and long-term?

Determining the most effective, fiscally responsible way to address the current and anticipated space needs for five years from now is a singular challenge for the school committee in collaboration with other town committees and Town Meeting, as well as the citizens of Lexington. We appreciate the outstanding educational opportunities available to our students and want to maintain excellence. To do that we need to plan where, when and how to provide the facilities required.

For the long term we will likely have tighter funding available for operational budgets. This translates into continuing to set priorities that not only maintains our facilities, but allows us to develop strategies to maintain a high performing school district in years when operational funding is perhaps less than what we have become accustomed in recent years.

Policy Questions

- 4. *Lexington public school enrollment is projected to increase in the short and medium term. Five of our six elementary schools and our two middle schools are running out of capacity. What are your priorities regarding school capital construction needs, and how do you see the role of the School Committee in this discussion?*

My priorities are to understand the need as clearly as possible given the uncertainty of long range projections, responding to the reality of present overcrowding, and adding space in as flexible, cost efficient manner as we can. We know that our school facilities are at or over capacity and it is not wise to be more than 90% of capacity because that does not provide room for growth. As we build needed spaces in the next several years we should plan for anticipated enrollment growth and facility expansion that will not only accommodate increased enrollment to keep pace with our current overcrowding, but plan wisely to have sufficient space to alleviate the present situation of overcrowding that we are experiencing.

The school committee has engaged an Enrollment Working Group to help determine enrollment projections, and an architectural firm to study current space capacity usage and short and mid term needs for expansion. The next steps require the school committee work with town financial committees to ask funds to determine what can be built, where and in what sequence that will garner the support of Lexington voters. Construction, in whatever form, will not be accomplished all at once, but we need a sequence that most effectively gets us to where we fully need to be within the next five year at the elementary and middle schools.

- 5. *What are your criteria for supporting a debt exclusion override to cover capital cost needs for school building construction?*

The criteria for school construction is the ability to meet our obligation to provide educational programming meeting the needs of all Lexington students. Lexington has a long tradition of supporting and expecting not only an adequate educational experience, but demands high quality, challenging programming. This does not mean that we need the finest, most expensive physical plants and materials, but it does mean that we have facilities that enable us to provide programs of study that are of the highest quality in safe, healthy, functional spaces. That means we provide these programs equitably in all our schools. Classrooms, tutorial spaces, physical and occupational therapy rooms, special education spaces, gymnasiums, science labs, technology resources, nurses stations, faculty planning rooms, bathrooms, storage areas, outside play areas, parking, administrative offices all need to be addressed in school facilities planning, and need to be provided equitably in all our schools.

The school committee requested prefabricated portable classrooms be installed at the high school to meet current programming and enrollment growth. That has proven to be a cost effective investment for an immediate need. We now have immediate needs at the Pre-K 8 school levels. We are currently seeking to provide for those needs in an equitable, cost effective manner, acknowledging that the challenge is significantly greater and will result in significant dollars when addressing seven schools that need attention, not just one.

6. *Academic Stress & At Risk Social Behavior: The Ad-Hoc Committee for Youth at Risk has presented its recommendations to the School Committee in Nov 2014. What should be the School Committee action plan to address academic stress & at risk behavior, and how would you measure whether it is successful?*

The Youth Risk Survey reported in November indicate many students are experiencing unhealthy levels of stress. Some of the more disturbing responses include the number of students who have at least thought about suicide, and others who report not getting sufficient sleep because they are studying and doing assignments until early hours in the morning. The staff has been studying the topic of homework. As a committee we need to review practices and policies relating to homework. Other students report that they are taking several AP courses because they feel peer pressure to do so. Offering Honors Level courses in certain content areas could help student select challenging courses that are more aligned with their level of interest and capability, while selecting AP for those subjects that of particular interest to them. I am requesting a comprehensive review of student services including guidance counselors, psychologists, wellness and health education teachers, social workers, nurses, and some special education teachers to recommend how we can most effectively offer early intervention services for students recognized to be at risk.

It is important that we take a holistic approach to help all students deal effective with managing periods of stress and not have them experience a state of stress and anxiety that feels overwhelming. To do this will require collaboration of school staff, parents, community services and programs, as well as students themselves. This a collective responsibility of our entire community.

7. *Special Education (SPED) in Lexington: What are, in your view, its strengths and its areas that could further improve? What sources do you use to inform your opinion about SPED, and what would you do as a School Committee member to continuously improve the quality of SPED in Lexington?*

Having been a school psychologist and Special Education Director, I intend to learn about our programs in great detail. Because I've only been on the committee a few months and attending to the superintendent search, space needs, and FY 16 budget, I am presently becoming familiar with the comprehensive programming offered in Lexington schools. My interests include how students are identified and diagnosed (assessments, class performance), how services are delivered and by whom, how goals are determined and periodically assessed for achievement, and how service are coordinated between and among different service providers.

What I have learned to date is that the system has a wide range of in house programs for students from Pre-k and planned through age 22. I'm interested in where different programs are offered (which schools) and if, as we consider facility expansion, we might align programs differently or continue present practice. Most importantly I am interested in the quality of our programs and will learn more as I communicate with appropriate staff. I do not mean any of these statements to be construed in negative terms. Rather I offer them as an acknowledgement that I've not been on scene long enough to cast qualitative judgment on any program other than to say I am pleased that we have a range of services that descriptively seem to meet a very wide range of services that enable students to be educated in their own school district.

8. *The Lexington Minuteman reports that, on state assessments, "Lexington METCO students reached 100 percent proficiency in English/language arts, an improvement from 57 percent in 2007, [and] math proficiency increased to 96 percent from 68 percent in 2007".*

How will the district maintain its level of focus on METCO student proficiency once Dr. Ash retires this June? Now that these high levels of proficiency have been reached on the MCAS, how would you measure success for the METCO program in the future?

Lexington has more than a 40 year history as an active participant in the METCO Program. Many young women and men have benefited from participation in this program with support of their families, peers and Lexington staff and families. The academic success of METCO and all Lexington students reflect the intent to make a concerted effort to provide for the needs of all students.

When I was Superintendent in Sudbury I attended the annual Legislative Forum at Beacon Hill to advocate for continue state financial support of METCO. In fact that has proven to be a decades old battle. Our concern at present is how the current state budget shortfall will be managed and what impact it might have on METCO funding. We will need that support to continue the level of direct service to students that has been the hallmark of success here in Lexington. Any reduction in funding will require us to plan how to best provide instructional services with limited funding. Success of the program goes far beyond academic performance, however. We want and expect students to experience full partnership and acceptance with Lexington students. It is not easy to come in and out of two cultural worlds of inner city and wealthy suburb. Great credit goes to the young men and women who put in long days and travel to share in the Lexington Public School experiences. METCO families express gratitude for this opportunity and we should take great pride in Boston families entrusting their children to us in spite of the hardship the long day and travel requires. Their success is something for all of us to celebrate, just as we celebrate our Lexington children.

9. *Lexington students come from a diverse community, with families of many backgrounds, with parents of varied professions, themselves schooled in different education systems from other US states or other countries. Parents have a range of expectations about how schools should be run, what constitutes student social/emotional wellness, and even what constitutes academic excellence and how it is measured.*

How will you, as a School Committee member, use community input as part of your decision making process?

This question is a natural sequel to the prior question and relates to question 6 about stress. Lexington is more diverse in culture and race than at any time in recent memory, perhaps than ever. With this diversity comes the variety of personal educational experiences first or second generational families bring. In the Fall campaign, and again in this campaign, I've often been asked how we can recognize and celebrate our differences. Answers do not come easily or fast enough for most of us.

The topics spans academic expectations, social/emotional wellbeing, holiday celebrations, as well as recruitment of culturally diverse staff reflective of our student population. I believe we need to engage in community discussion of these very topics. This is not simply an issue for our schools, any more than stress is. Having a more diverse presence in our governmental operations is as important as more diversity in our teaching staff. Engaging students directly in these sensitive discussions is essential. They have so much to tell us. Things we assume may be way off base. Our young people have much to teach us. We need to listen to them.

10. *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?*

I will address my three month experience on the school committee. Our very public process for the selection of a new superintendent was very successful. Final candidates came to us from a 10 member committee of citizens and staff who interviewed semi-finalists. The three finalists each spent a 12 hr day in the district visiting schools, town administrators and department heads, staff, parents, and community members, and were interviewed publicly by the school community who took turns spending some time with each candidate during the public meetings throughout the day. Dr. Mary Czajkowski was the unanimous choice of the school committee and the choice of our student representative. This unanimity in choice of the initial interview candidates, and school committee demonstrated the process was very effective.

In the Fall our committee asked the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Special Town Meeting for the purpose of funding standard modulars for the Bowman, Bridge, Fiske elementary schools to enable us to relieve overcrowding at those schools. An Ad Hoc Master Planning Committee considered studies being conducted by an architectural firm to identify our space needs and possible solutions

to meet those needs. We did not prevail in that request because we did not have a long range plan. I believe we needed to better persuade the Board that this solution in the form of either standard or pre fabricated modules would provide us with the needed time to determine what more we needed to learn what might be possible to do to fully understand how the overcrowding and anticipated enrollment growth might best be resolved to provide us flexibility in designing for programmatic needs in a timely and cost effective manner.

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 Saturday, 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 coordinator: Andrei Radulescu-Banu (bitdribble@gmail.com, 617-216-8509).
