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Name: Tom Diaz **Web Site Address:** www.tomdiazforschoolcommittee.com

Phone: (781) 863-8035 cell; (781) 454-9946 **Email:** thomasrdiaz@gmail.com

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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.*

My professional experience and school committee experience include managing complex systems and projects, making decisions based on forecasts of the future, learning from mistakes made by me and others, and building cooperative, effective teams. I worked in the computer industry from 1973 to 2003 in positions of increasing responsibility, culminating with a successful startup in 1998-2003. In the second half of my computer industry career, I was fortunate to be able to pick teams of people, grow and lead and refine the team, and produce winning systems. Some of my development work translated to teaching, since teachers have to make at least 180 plans a year--one for every school day for every class—a very big development effort.

I was elected to Town Meeting in 1997 and have served there since.

In 2004 I was rested, after six months of retirement, before I ran for the School Committee. I was elected in 2004 and reelected in 2007. In 2008, I was selected by an internship program that gave me the master's degree and on-the-job training needed to teach school, and which also qualified me for a teaching license in the state. I had planned to teach about five years and did in fact retire at the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

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

My choice to run for this seat continues 20 years of active involvement in Lexington government, including six years of service on the School Committee. I have always wanted to serve, and have enjoyed serving, in positions of responsibility concerning public schools. My interests and values have now been amplified by six years as a Boston Public Schools teacher.

I have always availed myself of the opportunity to participate in Lexington's government. Having lived other places, I can say that there is no other place where it is so straightforward for an active person to get involved. I got elected to Town Meeting in 1997. At the time, I was a busy software development executive at IBM, but I felt that as someone interested in government I should get involved.

In July 2014, soon after retiring from teaching, I decided that I would run for the School Committee again when the opportunity presented itself, thinking that months or years might go by. I was completely surprised by, and proud of, Mary Ann Stewart's appointment to the state board of education in August. That has given me the opportunity to pursue my goal now.

Candidate Platform

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

My two top priorities are the superintendent search and the revision of the Master School Building Plan. Both are items that must be concluded by March 2015 but which play out and need support for the next several years. For instance, the first three years of Dr. Ash's tenure (2005-2008) were very dynamic; he found several serious problems that needed attention and which needed unusually detailed attention from members of the School Committee. These are better times, but a new superintendent will still need the help of seasoned elected officials.

The superintendent search is being managed by recruiters who are former superintendents. I have observed them getting highly representative input from parents, on 9/22/14 and 9/23/14. With a diverse group of former School Committee members, I have also given them input directly. They will continue to interview stakeholders in Lexington and recruit, and I predict they will come up with four or five highly qualified finalists, one of whom we hope to select as the next Superintendent. If I include the four finalists we had in 2004, I will have been introduced to eight or nine outstanding people who have been vetted by the process. At that point one must have the judgment to say which of these qualified people is the best fit for Lexington's needs of 2014 and going forward. Our conditions are much better than in 2004, with very different problems to solve.

The other top priority is the revision of the master building plan, addressed in the next answer.

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?*

The school administration should continue the kind of work started by the Enrollment Working Group, to refine its methods for forecasting enrollment, taking into account the best data available on new housing development, housing occupied by school-age children, and housing density – number of children per unit. The Master Building Plan for schools should be revised with a horizon of five or six years, so that we have a long-term result that is flexible and that we're proud of. We will be committing to reconstruction of the Hastings school, preferably with state assistance, and to a number of additional construction projects, possibly including another new school building as well as smaller additions.

It is still too early to know the complete scope and cost of the plan for the next five years, but we should expect to be requesting design funds no later than Town Meeting in the spring, and we should expect to need a debt exclusion override when actual school construction is within a couple of years of completion, around 2017.

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

We need an active, sensitive listener who is also an intellectual leader and critical thinker. We need someone as proud as I am in our high ratings and academic reputation but who continues to ask questions. For instance, are all of our excellent learning opportunities available to all students, regardless of income or other needs? We have an increasing need for cross-cultural awareness and outreach. I would also like to see candidates who have demonstrated some success in addressing the stress and pressure faced by students in a high-performing district like Lexington.

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

In my time on the School Committee, our personnel had constructive, positive, cooperative relationships with the municipal staff. Our work together on budgets, for example, has been smooth and productive for many years. The level of cooperation was good enough to facilitate creation of the Department of Public Facilities, a jointly managed department responsible for all town and school buildings. Our desire in the future should be to maintain this excellent, collegial relationship, which I assume is as good now as it was in 2010.

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?*

I would like to see us continue to work, in the community and on the School Committee, to foster more bus riding and walking. I have confidence in the school administration and town personnel to look after the general needs for safety and traffic flow.

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

Yes, I have yearned to see world languages come back since we lost them in defeat of a 2006 override question. I am glad to see the School Committee promoting this plan, which could result in reintroduction of world languages by 2017. It is a good example of the Committee taking the initiative on a curriculum that is wanted by the community. We previously started in 3rd grade, but the actual choice of languages and time of starting is to be worked out by faculty and committee work in the coming couple of years.

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?*

I would like the administration and faculty to review this matter carefully to see what may be needed to improve our curriculum, at the elementary level and at higher levels. There always will be parents who are willing to spend private money to give their students “the edge”; that is their privilege. However, if they are enrolling students because of actual deficiencies in our teaching and learning, there are several reasons I would be concerned. First, because I want our students to get the best preparation from our own teachers, and second, because I want to be sure that all students have first-rate opportunities whether or not their parents can afford these enrichment courses.

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

I do not have a complete view at this point. As long ago as 2006, we lost some useful science offerings at the high school, in a defeated override question, and I am not completely sure we have recovered. I favor a science curriculum, and other curricula, that offer many levels of challenge and that offer choices for the students wanting more enrichment.

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?*

I am not sure exactly what should be done, but in general I am in favor of work being done during the school year, and preferably during the school day. I would like to see us provide incentives for more learning at those times with minimal reliance on summer preparation.

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?*

As a history teacher, I have personally experienced the pressure on important subjects that do not happen to be covered by high-stakes state testing. Art, music, physical education, computer science, and world languages are other obvious examples. The best insurance is the awareness of the problem evidenced by this question, and the provision of the schedule time and teachers to do justice to the “non-MCAS” subjects. It means doing more than we are “required” to do, which Lexington has often done. Our society wants to place emphasis on English language arts, mathematics, and science, and we are not likely to back off on those fronts. The important thing is to do what’s needed to retain our traditional strength in the other areas.

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?*

My impression is that Lexington has made considerable progress since, say, 10 years ago and that we have a good technology infrastructure and fairly good instructional technology training. My personal experience with Chromebooks in recent years, in Boston, was very positive. They are inexpensive, robust, and, with the excellent Google presentation, forms, and shared-document software, very flexible and easily adapted to classroom work. I was quickly using them every day in my middle school classes.

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?*

Our current preferred elementary sizes are 18 students in kindergarten, 22 in first and second grade, and 24 in grades 3-5. In many years we have been able to hire enough teachers and manage to those sizes in many schools, but obviously we lack the classrooms at this point to do so. That is a way of describing what drives the need for a revised master building plan. In any event, I personally believe these sizes are slightly too high in grades 3-5. As a teacher I appreciate how the complexity of class work seems to go up exponentially with the addition of new students beyond a certain point, and you get only so much benefit from having an aide or co-teacher to assist you. I do not have a specific new, lower number in mind but recommend that the administration research and negotiate a somewhat smaller size. I have the same view of secondary class sizes, where in Lexington we manage things more by teacher/student ratios in the building than by numbers of kids in a specific classroom at a specific time.

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 times?*

I know that implementation is complicated by transportation schedules and after-school activities, but I hope we will do the hard work to start somewhat later. I had a lot of sleepy adolescents in my first-period classes some years, and I don't think it was all about me and my lessons. I think later starts are especially useful for adolescents.

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?*

For the sake of answering this question, I will stipulate that those numbers are accurate. Speaking as a former School Committee member and also as a teacher, I would like students to have more down time than that. An even slightly longer lunch makes a big difference, too. A balanced approach to a longer school day would give more time to these periods of relaxation and would not just fill up the kids' schedules with more classes.

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?*

As implied earlier, I am very pleased with the Committee's initiative on elementary world languages. They are right to have promoted this idea, and they should take the time to work out a good plan. As a candidate for the board, I do not have any particular area to criticize from the sidelines. School committees do very hard work under often adverse circumstances and without enough opportunity for offline brainstorming. I hope to be helpful by bringing experience and another pair of hands to the problems.

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.
