

Thank you for giving me a chance to add to my responses at the CFIN forum. If there are any issues not answered in my statements below please feel free to call me (Alice Turkel at 617 491-8436).

To answer the question about my opinion in regards to district standards versus school level autonomy I am including below two motions, which I have put on the School Committee Agenda for November 1<sup>st</sup>. These motions are in response to documents the School Committee received from the Superintendent on Friday October 21<sup>st</sup>. These document can be read at:

[http://www3.CPSD.US/media/theme/Pro-Cambridge/network/10516/media/CPS%20Redesign/documents/Innovation\\_Agenda/ELA\\_SS\\_Trimester\\_System.pdf?rev=0](http://www3.CPSD.US/media/theme/Pro-Cambridge/network/10516/media/CPS%20Redesign/documents/Innovation_Agenda/ELA_SS_Trimester_System.pdf?rev=0)

The Superintendent's documents included a number of policy decisions that he requested the School Committee not vote upon. It is the job of the School Committee by State law to vote on policy decisions. The motions below will bring these policies forward to be voted by the School Committee. The policies presented below balance district standards and school level autonomy.

Motion that upper school curriculum standards be adopted for the district, which include both subject content and academic skills. And further, that district wide assessments of students' knowledge and skills, including both state mandated testing and locally developed authentic assessments, be developed. And further that school based teaching teams, in collaboration with the leadership of each upper school campus, of Amigos or of Ola, will determine how best to meet the upper school curriculum standards and how best to prepare students for the district wide assessments.

Teaching teams at each upper school campus, at Amigos and at Ola will decide whether or not:

1. to teach subjects in an interdisciplinary mode (like humanities)
2. to teach in single or multi-grade level groupings of students
3. to loop students (a group of students having the same teacher for two years)
4. to loop curriculum (teaching curriculum in alternate years to more than one grade level of students)

5. a teacher will teach one core subject to four classes of students or two subjects to two classes of students.

If students or a sub-group of students in a particular upper school, Amigos or Ola fall below the achievement levels met by students in the other upper schools, Amigos and Ola on tests or on authentic assessments then the Superintendent may mandate how the curriculum will be delivered at that upper school.

Motion that the upper school curriculum standards be designed to be taught in approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the school year. And further that the pacing of the school year be designed by school-based teaching teams, in collaboration with the leadership of each upper school campus or of Amigos or of Ola. And further that the curriculum content of the remaining approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the school year be designed by school-based teaching teams, in collaboration with the leadership of each upper school campus or Amigos or Ola. And further that curriculum content be designed

- to extend, enrich, or supplement CPS units of study
- explore additional elements of the Common Core
- implement “outside” curriculum, such as ‘Facing History and Ourselves’
- offer additional units of study developed by CPS departmental teams
- offer additional units of study, developed by school-based teaching teams, in collaboration with the leadership of each upper school campus, of Amigos or of Ola, which reflect the interests and needs of their students.

For more information about my stances on educational issues please visit my web site at: <http://aliceturkel.com/index.html> or read on:

**Background:**

I'm running for School Committee to help make our schools:

- places students want to attend.
- places where faculty feel respected and supported.
- places where parents/guardians are confident that their children are being challenged and supported.

I was first involved in the Cambridge School System as a parent

organizer of the parents who started the Cambridgeport School in 1990. I am currently serving my fifth term on the School Committee. My husband, Mitch Ryerson, and I have three children. Our daughters went all the way through the Cambridge Public Schools K-12<sup>th</sup> grade. They attended the Cambridgeport and King Open schools, and graduated from CRLS. Our son is now in 7th grade at King Open.

I bring to this job my experience as:

- a teacher
- a parent
- an advocate for student health
- a volunteer in the schools and in the community
- a leader of parents
- an artist and designer

Before becoming involved in local politics I taught woodworking in public, private and after-school settings for preschool through college level students. I have a Bachelor's of Applied Arts degree from Boston University in Woodworking and Furniture Design and I received my Massachusetts certification as a kindergarten through 12th grade teacher of both art and industrial arts at Boston University. I've worked in cabinet shops, as a theatrical carpenter and have sold furniture I designed and constructed through galleries and by private commission.

I have worked with the Public Health Department on a range of children's health issues including producing two public forums on healthy/risky teen behaviors and on childhood obesity. I introduced Chef Vin Connelly to our school system and worked with him to make our school cafeteria food healthier and more appealing by adding new cooked-from-scratch recipes and more fresh fruits and vegetables. Chef Vin is now the head of the kitchen at CRLS. The Principal of CRLS has said that the improved food has led to more students eating in the cafeteria, which is building community in a new and positive way.

I am an overseer on the board of the Boston Children's Museum and a board member of the Friends of the Community Learning Center (Cambridge's public adult education center), which helps parents of many CPS students improve their English language skills and work toward high school diplomas. I also served on the Healthy Playgrounds Task Force for the City of Cambridge, working

to create a variety of playgrounds throughout the city to challenge and engage all ages and abilities.

I work full time for Cambridge students and their families. My experience and ability to work collaboratively is helpful in shaping policies that will positively affect the achievement of Cambridge's students in the years to come.

**Priorities:**

My overarching priority is ensuring that all students have powerful, enriching, engaging experiences. Students deserve curriculum and instruction that leads them to high achievement. I believe in maximizing opportunities for students with different learning styles, strengths and interests.

Achieving Success for All Students

Success in school for children of all racial, economic, and language backgrounds and for students with and without special education needs means having each student do well academically, develop a love of learning and be positively engaged with the curriculum, with his/her peers and with the faculty.

Implementing the new Upper and JK-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Schools

Critical to the success of this new plan is making sure it is realized in a way that **supports strong, powerful, passionate teaching**. School based teams of teachers must have the autonomy to decide the best methods of instruction for the students they teach so they can guide every student to success in meeting district wide goals for skills and knowledge. The district wide goals should be designed to insure all students are equally well prepared for entering high school.

The Innovation Agenda (IA) has made promises to the community that must be kept. I will work to ensure that the best of what Cambridge Schools have been doing is incorporated with new best practices. We need to make sure that students in each school receive an education that prepares them with the knowledge and the skills they need for success. In addition to academics the Upper Schools must provide a rich array of art and enrichment courses during the school day. It is also critical that afterschool options that appeal to the many interests of middle school age students be available. Improvements in the upper schools should not be at the expense of the JK-5<sup>th</sup> grade students.

I will work to make sure that parents/guardians and faculty are

able to actively participate in this planning year and in the implementation of the IA.

### Early Childhood Education

It is important to focus on the early years of school for all children. Having successful beginning experiences build students' abilities, confidence and pleasure in learning. Early intervention also can reduce the need for and/or intensity of special education services later. I will continue working towards moving our entry age from 4 ½ years old to 4 years old so that all four year olds can benefit from a developmentally appropriate early year in school.

### Create a Healthy Learning Atmosphere

Making sure our schools support students' social, emotional, physical and mental health is a priority. Meeting these needs enhances students' ability to focus on academics and creates a positive learning atmosphere for the whole class.

### Multiple Assessments

Establishing multiple ways of assessing students, teachers and schools, which do not rely solely on test scores is a priority. This is more important now than ever, because the State Board of Education recently voted that every individual teacher must be evaluated based on student assessments. Students should have a variety of ways to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Our City values and benefits from creative thinking, the arts, project based learning, school based governance and family involvement. We must find ways to acknowledge ongoing success in those areas, as well as ways to hold principals accountable for the quality of this important work in every school.

### **School Department Administration and Superintendent**

One of the School Committee's primary roles is hiring and evaluating the Superintendent. Superintendent Dr. Jeffery Young began his tenure in July 2009. To effectively evaluate Dr. Young, the School Committee must weigh his performance against the goals they have set for the school system.

It is the Superintendent's job to mold the administration into a structure that will best support moving the school system towards a shared set of goals. This can require restructuring the role of

departments, changing their leadership and changing staffing patterns. I believe reducing central administration and moving more of the school department funding into the control of individual schools will allow schools to better serve students.

One of the Superintendent's most important jobs is hiring and evaluating principals. Just as principals should support teachers, the Superintendent should support both experienced and new principals; inspiring them to grow and to improve their practice. If we move to more funding decisions made at the school level, the strength of each principal is key to using those resources to the maximum benefit for all students.

## **School Department Budget and Capital Needs**

### The Budget

One of my budget goals is to move more control of funding to the school level. At the school level principals, school staff, teachers, and parents/guardians can work together to create the best learning environments for their student population. Knowing students well and understanding their needs can lead to spending funds in ways that directly and positively impact student learning. This approach must be paired with high expectations for students in all schools and a high level of accountability from principals to the Superintendent of Schools.

Another goal is to make the school budget more comprehensible to parents/guardians, the general public and school staff. A more clearly written budget, with better analysis and summaries would help to answer some of the persistent questions raised in Cambridge: "Why don't all children succeed at higher levels, given how much we spend?" "Why do funding decisions seem unfair from school to school?"

This past Spring as budget co-chair I asked for a comparison of Cambridge's budget with the school budget for Newton in the last year (2009) that Superintendent Young was Superintendent in Newton. This can be viewed on line at:

<http://www3.cpsd.us/media/network/10516/media/CPS%20Redesign/documents/Financial/Budget/Comparison-of-Per-Pupil-Sending.pdf?rev=1> . It is a document that shows how the approximately \$10,000 additional funding per pupil in Cambridge is spent.

## Capital Needs, Renovations and Surplus Buildings

On the renovation of CRLS - hurrah! Our students and faculty deserve an up-to-date and well-equipped place to study and to work. This renovation came in under budget and on time.

The city is now planning to renovate three (one was recently renovated) of the four elementary schools that will soon house Upper Schools and JK-5<sup>th</sup> grade schools in the same building. These renovations will be necessary to make the physical facilities function smoothly with a large population of students and two different schools sharing the space.

While the City pays for these major renovations the school department's budget must include funding for the many needs the schools in these buildings have pending renovation. Equally important is preparing the Amigos School's new home on Upton Street. It is also important to have funds for the repairs and maintenance all the school buildings need.

Cambridge now has two surplus school buildings, the Longfellow building on Broadway and the Webster (formerly Graham and Parks) building on Upton Street. I think the school system should continue to maintain these buildings. It is much less expensive to use city owned buildings than to find and rent buildings on an as needed basis. History has shown that surplus buildings are often needed. It would be unwise to sell these buildings now.

Next fall the building on Upton Street will become the Amigos School and the building on Broadway will house the Extension High School and a year later it will give the system a place to house students as elementary schools are renovated.

## **The Innovation Agenda**

I, alone, voted against the Innovation Agenda for the following reasons:

- Educational research supports the continuity of K-8 schools.
- Going from 12 to 16 schools increases administration while decreasing classroom teachers.
- Parents/guardians are less likely to feel welcome in middle schools.
- Buildings housing upper schools will have two schools sharing limited space and staffing.
- It requires reducing resources to the K-5<sup>th</sup> grade schools.

- The Superintendent has stated the IA will not close the achievement gap.

The vote was a 6 to 1 vote and now it is my job to work to make this plan the best it can be. My hope is that Cambridge will have wonderful schools in this new configuration.

My hopes for the IA include:

- Students and teachers having enough peers and colleagues.
- More arts and elective choices for students.
- Better afterschool options for students.

I will work hard to support the IA:

- Allowing local decisions about teaching in each upper school.
- Maintaining the target of 88 students per grade, supporting a good student/teacher ratio and flexible scheduling.

### **Controlled Choice and Student Assignment Policies**

Since the 1970's Cambridge has been a leader in working to create schools where the student body is diversified through family choice. Most families receive one of their top 3 choices each year. The system of controlled choice has fostered a range of educational philosophies in Cambridge that give families educational options such as alternative education, bilingual education, Core Knowledge, or Montessori style education.

The Controlled Choice Plan was developed to integrate schools as children enter a school in kindergarten or in a later grade. It is an imperfect plan because it deals neither with the fact that many families will not send their child to a mandatory assignment, nor that families are leaving schools. To improve the balance of students in our schools through choice and not through mandatory assignments, the school system must become more responsive to parent/guardian desires. We must be more flexible about opening the types of programs families are interested in. A good example of this would be the dramatic increase in families choosing the Tobin School after it was changed to a Montessori school.

Each school that is not well balanced should be asked to develop a plan to attract a student population that more closely matches the diversity of students represented in the whole school system. This plan would require schools to look hard at how they

present themselves to the public. What are they doing and what message does it send to different populations? To be a welcoming, desirable school for the families that do not live nearby a school requires that extra something that makes getting on a bus worthwhile. Our goal should be to make all families in Cambridge feel like the public schools are their first choice and that when entering the Cambridge School Lottery a family is guaranteed to "win" because all our schools are welcoming, high achieving schools one would be happy to send one's child to.

### **Achievement Gap**

Success in school for children of all racial, economic, and language backgrounds, and for students with and without special education needs is the school system's most important goal. Success means doing well academically, developing a love of learning and being positively engaged with the curriculum, with peers and with the faculty. Closing the achievement gap means more than just equalizing test scores, it means finding ways to connect with each student and their family in powerful ways that help each student achieve.

The gap will only close if we approach it from many angles at once and utilize highly regarded research to inform our policies. We know from studies that strong pre-school opportunities can dramatically affect long term outcomes; to that end the school district should partner with the city to create more and better educational opportunities prior to Kindergarten.

Other initiatives that will aid in closing the achievement gap are:

- Hiring and retaining a teaching staff that reflects the diversity of our student body.
- Creating a variety of approaches to teaching all subjects so that all students can access and engage with the curriculum.
- Creating schools that are safe, nurturing and challenging for every student.

### **Honors Classes, Gifted Students, Intensive Studies Program, Tracking:**

In order to meet the main goals of the CPS (closing the achievement gap, and creating schools that provide a safe, healthy and engaging learning atmosphere) it is important to give every student academic challenge and to not place students in classrooms that limit their potential. To this end the Superintendent and School

Committee should come together to develop a policy that addresses the needs of advanced or high achieving students at every grade level.

Cambridge Public School Department has no clear, consistent philosophy about meeting the needs of students who are high achieving academically. In our elementary schools access to advanced curriculum appears to vary from school to school, and classroom to classroom. At the sixth grade level some students are invited to go to a program just for "motivated students" (ISP), while some high achievers remain in untracked classrooms in their K-8 schools. The High School offers classes at different levels including honors and advanced placement, which often serve an unbalanced (by race and class) set of students. This model does not encourage all students to meet their highest potential.

I believe our schools would do a better job of meeting the needs of all students in untracked classrooms if we acknowledged the needs of high achieving students as genuine. I support continuing professional development for all teachers, in all curriculum areas, so they can improve their teaching skills and take advantage of practices that enable teaching at a variety of learning levels in a classroom. Teachers need a support structure to help them find appropriate curriculum; curriculum which allows students to engage in the same themes and topics as their classmates at different levels, allowing each student access to the important content in any subject and challenging each student appropriately.

### **Special Education**

Cambridge families would be better served if the district offered more options for students to be in appropriate programs within our own school district. Children should not have to travel long distances, out of their community and at great expense to be educated in school settings we cannot adequately oversee. The families of too many students feel forced to seek out-of-district placements because they find out there are types of programs not offered in Cambridge that could help their child(ren) succeed. Effective programs for Language-based Learning Disabilities, such as Orton-Gillingham, in which teachers can receive specific training could and in my opinion should be brought to our district. High quality programs for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities would also make sense in district, given the large number of students in need of that type of program. I

do not believe we should force families to come back into the district if their children are thriving in an out-of-district school, but if these new programs are started the way the Autism Program was, with the youngest students and grow each year with the students, I think they could be successful in meeting students' needs in district. It would be important to have parents/guardians play an active advisory role in the development of these new programs. I would like to see the district opening at least one new style of placement each year and support it's growth in the following years.

### **After-school opportunities**

CRLS offers a wonderful, high quality array of out-of school time sports teams, clubs and other enrichment activities such as community service and being in musical or dramatic performances. There are also many good options for after-school care and enrichment classes at the youngest grades. It is now Cambridge's challenge to create the most beneficial out-of-school time programming for middle school age students. This is currently being planned and should be made easier by having all 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students released at the same time starting in the fall of 2012.

### **Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Diversity:**

Currently, in Cambridge, our school population is rising, while across Massachusetts many teachers are retiring and leaving the profession. It is a challenge to hire and retain a diverse, high quality teaching staff. Our student body is composed of children of many racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. If our teaching staff is to better reflect the student body, the staff of our human resources department must be given clear goals and the resources to meet those goals. The Superintendent must work with the teachers to understand what makes teaching in Cambridge challenging and rewarding. This will inform his understanding of how to support teachers so Cambridge can grow and retain a strong, diverse teaching staff.

### **Enrollment and the Marketing of Public Schools vs. Charter Schools and Private Schools**

While it is important, in a era when families have so many options for school, to market our schools competitively, I believe it is fundamentally more important to offer programs families believe will

be great for their child. Families do not flock to some of our schools over others or find some mandatory assignments unacceptable because of marketing or lack there of. In order for more families to choose our public schools the real work must be done in changing unattractive programs into those families find desirable. In order for our schools to be integrated by choice families must feel every school is worth getting on a bus to go to.

### **Elementary Schools and Curriculum**

I believe in school-based management. The school system should set the district wide goals, designed to insure all students are equally well prepared for the upper schools. School based teams of teachers should then have the autonomy to decide the best methods of instruction for the students they teach. Teacher involvement in designing curriculum leads to the strong, powerful, passionate teaching necessary to guide every student to success in meeting district wide goals for skills and knowledge

### **High School:**

The buildings of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School have just been renovated and interest in enrolling in CRLS is on the rise. The high school will face challenges scheduling more students into appropriate classes. It is critical that not only academic courses be increased if the numbers warrant, but also that elective options increase sufficiently. For many students the vocational education courses at the Rindge School of Technical Arts (a part of CRLS), art courses, foreign language courses and other electives are what make the high school a place they want to be, and a place where they can be successful.

In addition to the wide selection of course options during the school day, CRLS offers a rich array of after school clubs, teams and activities. These offerings that extend the school day experience must be supported because they are a critical part of a high quality, successful high school education. I will work with the School Committee to assure that the proper resources are in place for CRLS to continue its growth, and to maintain its position as one of the top urban public schools in the Commonwealth.

### **MCAS and Measuring Student Achievement:**

It is important to establish multiple ways of assessing students, teachers and schools, which do not rely solely on test scores. Students should have a variety of ways to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. If we value creative thinking, the arts, project based learning, school based governance and family involvement we must find ways to acknowledge ongoing success in those areas and ways to hold principals accountable for the quality of the work that goes into improving those areas in their schools.

Student achievement should be measured in a variety of ways such as the quality of portfolios and demonstrations of student work. Standardized tests such as MCAS can be a useful tool in giving an overview of how whole school or grade level populations are achieving on a narrow set of goals. I will continue to monitor the Mass State frameworks and participate in the State discussions that take place around the MCAS tests. I want to work to assure that the tests are meaningful, and that our students benefit from the MCAS system. The MCAS results easily let large schools look at sub-group achievement (small schools often do not have enough students in any given sub-group to receive sub-group results), forcing schools to pay attention to groups such as English language learners, special education students and children of different racial backgrounds. Cambridge has learned some things from the tests, but while they have focused attention on some areas of the curriculum, the drive to increase test scores has diverted time and attention from other equally important parts of the curriculum and school day. I believe Cambridge can use the information from the testing to help, not hinder our students if the broad needs of students are kept in perspective.

### **Teacher Evaluations and Performance Measures**

Teachers are the single most important resource in our schools. They must be supported with relevant professional development, adequate supplies and supportive leadership. All the principals must work to ensure that every teacher is evaluated fairly and on schedule. Principals should be a resource to both experienced and new teachers, inspiring them to grow and to improve their practice. Insuring teacher evaluations are done well is a central part of the Superintendent's review of each principal's performance and in turn a central piece of the data the School Committee uses in evaluating the Superintendent.

## **Bullying**

Bullying can happen in any school and every school should have a plan to deal with it. Most children try out a range of behaviors both positive and negative. They learn what is and isn't appropriate based on the reactions they get from the children and adults they are in contact with. When teasing, excluding, threatening or intimidating behavior is repeated or becomes a pattern, it is bullying. When a child is stuck in the role of victim or aggressor there is a problem. Schools must use two approaches in dealing with bullying. One is to use anti-bullying curriculum, or other classroom management techniques to set classroom and school expectations for behavior. Good curriculum makes the students aware of the power they have to change a situation for the better. The other approach is to deal with both the bully's and the victim's mental health needs. Often a bully does not feel good about his/herself and uses making another child uncomfortable or scared as a way to build their feelings of power and self-worth. This cannot be remedied easily with a set of rules or expectations and consequences and is better dealt with by helping the bully build internal resources. Likewise the victim may need help in feeling confident enough to not present him/herself as a target. Teachers must have access to mental health professionals who can help children find their way out of the roles of bully or victim.

## **Family Involvement**

When parents/guardians and schools truly act as partners, students thrive. Schools must create numerous and varied ways to welcome parents/guardians into the schools, and into their child's school life. Every family should be able to find a comfortable role in which they can contribute to their child's education. Parent/guardian involvement can take many forms, from working on school governance, attending student performances, overseeing homework, organizing or attending school events, participating in parent/teacher conferences to readying students to get on the school bus each morning.

Communication between home and school is the foundation of family involvement. Student-to-student and family-to-family connections and communication also strengthen school communities. The school system should make facilitating connections a priority and find a safe way to facilitate student directories for every school.

## **School Councils**

School Improvement Councils are organizations of parents, teachers and principals working together to make their schools better places for the students they serve. Decisions made by school councils are decisions made by people who know the children they are serving well and who care about those children.

This collaborative form of school governance can lead to positive change in schools. During my tenure on School Committee I advocated successfully for including School Improvement Funds in the budget. These funds are available to each school to spend to move the priorities of their School Improvement Council forward. I will continue to advocate for more control of the Cambridge Public School Budget at the school level, where those closest to our children can decide how most efficiently to use resources for supporting student learning and well being.