

Questions for School Committee Candidates Forum

October 13, 2011

Abbreviations

CPS=Cambridge Public Schools

CRLS=Cambridge Rindge and Latin, the high school

CSAG=Citywide School Advisory Group

IA=Innovation Agenda

SES=Socioeconomic Status

School Structure and Curriculum, including Innovation Agenda

- Assuming that all CPS school need to follow district and state learning standards at the middle school level, how much school-level autonomy should there be in decisions about curriculum, teaching activities, materials, projects and assignments, and assessments? Specifically, what role(s) should teachers and administrators at the 4 middle schools, Amigos, and Olá play in determining the content and teaching of grade 6-8 curriculum?

I have no desire to tell teachers how to teach. I think the District needs to set the overall standards of what children will/should learn at all upper schools but teachers need to be allowed to decide how to get the children there. For example, if the District decides that Ancient Egypt should be studied in the 6th grade, fine. How teachers' cover that subject should be a school level decision. Also, if the District decides that all 8th graders should be able to write a 10 page research paper by graduation, fine. How teachers' teach them that skill should be a school level decision.

- We currently have a lot of curriculum autonomy amongst the 13 K-5 programs. Assuming that all CPS school need to follow district and state learning standards at the K-5 level, how much school-level autonomy should there be in decisions about K-5 curriculum, teaching activities, materials, projects and assignments, and assessments? What are the reasons for your view?

My above answer applies to the K-5 schools as well.

- Many people say that being multilingual is a critical 21st century skill. Our schools now offer, at different schools and grades, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, French, and Spanish, but there does not seem to be a coherent K-12 World Language goal or program. If money were not an issue, what World Language program you would like to see in Cambridge, in terms of the languages offered and the amount of instruction offered at different grade levels?

“If money were not an issue” is a rather important caveat to this question. If money weren't an issue I would love to see multiple language options taught starting in kindergarten. Sadly, money is an issue. So, to be realistic, I would like to see foreign language start as early as possible and I think we need to look at what are the dominate languages in the world and in our community. For example, I come from an Italian

family (doesn't McGovern sound Italian), and I would love to have had the opportunity to learn it in school, however, the truth is, Italian is not a dominate language in the world or in our community, so as much as it's a great language and important to some, if we had to make choices, it wouldn't be one that should continue. I think Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, are probably the most dominate.

- We now have a beautifully renovated high school building. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current *educational program* at CRLS, and what changes and improvements would you would like to see the district focus on going forward.

Strengths: strong, committed teachers and staff, incredible academic and social opportunities, a strong sense of community, the lowest dropout rate in the state, high graduation rates, a strong vocational program and the use of technology to enhance academics.

Weaknesses: My biggest concern at CRLS is that our classes are not diverse. For all of the progress we made in balancing the learning communities, we have not made that progress at ensuring that children of all backgrounds are in CP, Honors, and AP classes. That is just a fact. So, we need to focus on how to increase the diversity at these levels. Another concern I have is that students on IEPs are not receiving the support they need in Honors and AP classes. We have many children who can achieve at those levels if not for their disability and we to do more to ensure that we are supporting them to reach their full potential.

- Some School Committee members have said that combining English Language Arts and Social Studies into an integrated Humanities course at the middle school level benefits some students but disadvantages others. Do you agree with this and why? Assuming that all campuses should offer a similar curriculum, do you think that curriculum should have an integrated Humanities course or separate ELA and social studies courses?

We talk a lot about “data driven decisions”; well the MCAS data shows that the schools that are teaching Humanities are struggling with “High Risk Students” (a new category by the DOE that includes special education, low income and English Language Learners combined) in ELA. As difficult as that may be to hear, that is what the data shows. So, “yes” I do think that Humanities benefits some and not others. I think the individual campuses should decide for themselves if they want to teach Humanities or separate ELA and Social Studies. However, this needs to be a decision by ALL the schools that make up those campuses. To be honest, I have heard from King Open parents that they want to keep Humanities but not from FMA or CPort parents. I have heard from Graham and Parks parents that they want to keep Humanities, but not from Tobin or Haggerty parents. So, whatever decision is made, it has to be one that all the schools that make up those campuses agree on. It cannot be one of the three making the decision for all. In addition, if ELA and Social Studies is going to be combined into Humanities, then I need to see how these schools plan on improving ELA for At-Risk students. To simply pick up the

KO or G/P model when the data shows that many children are not doing as well as we want, is simply not acceptable. If schools can reach the benchmarks and expectations then how they do that, either ELA and Social Studies or Humanities, is fine with me, just make sure all of our children are doing well.

- Do you think we will need to close or merge any of our K-5 schools in the near future given your views on the optimal size for K-5 schools? If so, how should these decisions be made?

I certainly hope we won't have to close schools. Enrollment has been going up, which is a good sign. If we find ourselves in a position where a school or schools need close the first step would be designing a process to make that decision. Is it going to be based on MCAS, enrollment, choice, size, facility, etc. I can't say, today, what I would include, other than to say that how children are progressing and achieving has to be a key component.

- The state special education rate in Massachusetts is 17%. In Cambridge, 22% of our students are in Special Education. Why do you think Cambridge has a higher than average Special Education rate? Do you think the current rate is too high, too low, or appropriate, and why?

I work with school districts around Massachusetts regarding special education. I see, first hand, how other communities support (or really, don't support) their special education students. Although Cambridge is certainly not perfect, we are by far more willing to support our children through special education services than any other district I have seen. So, our willingness to provide services is one reason our numbers are higher. A second reason is that we have many intelligent, strong advocates for parents, who know the law and hold our district accountable. This leads to more children receiving the services they need because so many of our parents are able to successfully advocate for their children. As far as what I think of the current rate, I don't think it's too high or too low. "It is what it is" as Coach Belichick likes to say. I think we need to be careful not to over identify students, particularly student's of color, which is a problem in our district, but at the end of the day, if a child requires services that will allow them to reach their full potential, then we have a legal, and more importantly, ethical obligation to provide them with those services.

- How will you ensure that Cambridge public school students are provided with health education, physical education and daily recess?

One of my main issues with the over emphasis on standardized testing is that many other areas, such as health and physical education, recess, art, drama, music etc. end up being cut back because they are deemed "less important." In Cambridge, we have resisted this push much more than other communities. How will I ensure that children are provided with these opportunities, I will continue to talk about them, I will continue to support policy and funding for them, I will continue to stress their importance.

- We currently have a Core Knowledge School and a Montessori School. Some people have suggested that we have International Baccalaureate school, another Montessori school, etc. Do you think that more of our K-5 schools should adopt specific curricula developed outside of the district, such as national or international programs such as Core Knowledge, Montessori, IB, or other programs?

It is certainly something to be thought about, however, now that we have passed the IA we would need to make sure that those K-5 schools would transition into the new upper schools. It is very easy for elected officials to promise, “I want another Montessori” or “I want an IB school” so they can appeal to certain demographics, but the truth is, it is never that simple. I’m for honest conversations. I love the Montessori program. When I was running for School Committee the first time, I sat down with then Superintendent Fowler-Finn and said we should offer a public Montessori program. It is a great and popular program. Whether we can have another one, or whether or not we can have an IB, will take more discussion than simply throwing out a campaign sound bite, because we have to make those decisions in the context of the entire district.

- For challengers: if you had been on the School Committee on the night of the final vote on the Innovation Agenda, how would you have voted and why?

I’m not a challenger, but I will answer why I voted for it. Let me begin by saying that this was not an easy decision and that there are many aspects of K-8 schools that I think are wonderful for children. However, after reviewing OUR district, it just became glaringly clear to me that our system of 12, independent, uncoordinated schools, without a shared vision, or shared goals, or a shared understanding of what skills children need to be successful at high school was simply not working as a district. It was working in pockets for those children who were lucky enough to get into a handful of schools via a lottery, but it was not working across the board. Some people criticized that this plan as just a scaffolding or structure. I don’t disagree with that, however, I came to believe that our current structure was not allowing us, and was, in fact, impeding us, from getting to the place we wanted to be. Four upper schools that are coordinated in WHAT they teach but not HOW they teach will lead to a more equitable academic and social experience for our children across the district.

People who know me know that next to my family I love this community more than anything. Say what you want about my decisions or votes, but no one can say that I don’t care about Cambridge and Cambridge children. Voting in favor of the IA made zero political or personal sense for me. Many of my supporters were against it, as were many of my friends. At the end of the day, my responsibility and my integrity to make decisions based on what I feel is best for the district, and not what is politically or personally beneficial is what I stand by. This is what I did. I took a politically and personally courageous vote because I truly believe that this will lead to better outcomes for all of our children. If I didn’t think that, I never would have voted for it.

- The Innovation Agenda created larger upper school programs in part to reduce the isolation of 6-8th grade teachers and students in small 6-8 grade cohorts. Under the Innovation Agenda, both Amigos and Ola will remain as K-8 programs with small 6-8 grade cohorts. How would you ensure that middle school students and teachers in Ola and Amigos receive the same attention and resources as the students and teachers in the four larger upper schools?

I answered this question last night. I am very concerned about Amigos and Ola. I think things may be a bit easier for Ola since they will be sharing a building with an upper school campus so there can be a easier connection made, but Amigos is in a different position. I supported Amigos getting their own building because to have them in two buildings and coming together with children who didn't speak Spanish in the lower grades, would have been the death of that program. By remaining in their own building, their program will be preserved. The difficulty is their students won't receive the same experience as those children in the four upper school campuses. So, we need to make sure that we continue to include Amigos, and Ola, in the conversations, that we offer them the same facilities as the upper schools and that we they also are part of the district wide benchmarks for upper school children. But to be honest, and especially for Amigos, it will be a different experience.

- Cambridge currently has a K-8 Spanish immersion school, a K-8 Portuguese immersion program, and will soon have a K-6 Chinese immersion program. Should Cambridge have more immersion programs, either with some or all of these same languages, or different languages? Why or why not?

This was the second part of the question I answered last night. I'm not sure where we would fit another immersion school. Unless a current K-5 wanted to start or change their program, I don't think we have the space, money or enrollment to open a new K-5 school.

- One of our smallest programs is the Ola Portuguese immersion program, and it is often overlooked when the School Committee and administration discuss CPS policy. Do you think the district should maintain Ola? If so, what would you do as a School Committee member to support its growth?

I think Ola is an important program, but it is one that has struggled with enrollment. I wouldn't say that it is "overlooked". I know many of us talk about Ola and have met with and supported parents and teachers from the program. I think it falls into a unique category as it is not its own school. Census data shows that there has been a drop in Portuguese speaking families in the city, so if we are going to support Ola's growth, we need to reach out to non-Portuguese speaking families and show them the value of the program.

- How do you think it be possible for the new middle schools to remain autonomous while keeping district alignment?

There has to be a balance and a mutual understanding that autonomy is important but so is a district wide vision. I think as long as the individual campuses have the power to make teaching, scheduling, hiring decisions, then they will remain somewhat autonomous. However, I will say that I did not support this change to go from 12 completely autonomous schools to 4 completely autonomous schools. We need some district alignment that is what the IA was based on. So balance, open communication, respecting teachers will all be critical.

- Some of our new/future middle schools will increase their middle school populations over two-fold. How do you propose to keep these new multi-aged campuses SAFE and WELCOMING to our JK-5 students?

I think there are things we can do with the design of the buildings that won't make our JK-5 students feel overwhelmed by the "big kids", and there will be different end times for the JK-5 schools and the upper schools, so all the children won't be leaving the building at once, which may have been intimidating for some of our younger students. Just because these are going to be separate schools with different names, doesn't mean they can't interact, so I would expect and advocate for some of the programs like reading buddies and such to continue, which will help build relationships.

- Are you satisfied that we are serving our most capable students well? If ISP is dismantled, what, if anything, should replace it?

I'm not satisfied. I think we need to do more to reach many of our students. If ISP does not continue, then the Supt will need to be very clear about how he plans to meet the various needs of our students.

- In his July 20th meeting with parents of students in the ISP (Intensive Studies Program) Superintendent Jeff Young acknowledged that there are middle school students in our district who are unchallenged academically. Advanced learners in our district come from every ethnicity, race, and socio-economic bracket. If elected, what programs will you support, to insure these students receive the academic challenge they need, without harming other students who already are sufficiently challenged?

There is no question that this is a challenge. I do not support tracking of students. I do not want to see different, segregated classes for students. I do think that within a heterogeneous class if a teacher wants to group kids based on ability then I can live with that. But these groups need to be fluid. Students need to come and go into these groups based on their ability. If we need to consider an increase in teachers at the middle school level to make this happen, then we should. If we need to enter into an agreement with Lesley and Harvard School of Education, for them to provide Master's candidates in Education to work in our upper schools to assist teachers, then we should. We should do

whatever it takes to make sure that every child's needs are being met, but I am not willing to put an 11 year old child on a "track" that will eventually lead to lower level classes at the high school, and I'm afraid that is what will happen.

Achievement Gaps

On the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade reading and math MCAS tests, there are very wide achievement gaps within all of our schools between the scores of White, Hispanic, and African American students. For example, only about 38% of Hispanic and African American 3rd graders scored proficient in reading vs. 78% of White students. There are also large gaps between low-income and non-low income students; between special education and regular education students; and between girls and boys.

- What do you consider the underlying causes of students' achievement gaps?

In the overall picture, I think much of the achievement gap, especially when considering low-income students, has to do with academic opportunities early in life. I believe that quality, early childhood education is vitally important to closing the achievement gap. We hear from our Kindergarten teachers that incoming students have a wide range of abilities that compounds over the years. I also believe that as a District, including our teachers, need to have higher expectations for all of our children. All children can learn and we need to have high expectations for all children.

- Are you satisfied with the way that the ways that the district measures the achievement gaps and the schools' success or failure in closing them?

I have never been a big fan of the MCAS, but it is a measure that we can use to see how children are doing across the District. I think instead of comparing subgroups against each other, we should be comparing all subgroups to the goal of "proficient" because in the end, we want all children to reach that goal.

As far as our success in closing the gap, I am not satisfied. I don't see how anyone could be. Although we have made progress in some areas, it is not enough.

- Without discussing four-year-olds, preschool, summer school, or afterschool programs, what would you do to improve our K-5 programs to narrow achievement gaps and increase achievement amongst the lowest performing students?

I guess I have a little problem with the question. Its like asking, without talking about the engine, the transmission, and gasoline, tell me how a car runs? You can't talk about closing the achievement gap without talking about 4 year olds, preschool, summer school and after school, especially since these are all areas that as a district, we need to focus on.

In addition to those areas, quality assessment of children's needs, teacher professional development, improved outreach to families, and tutoring, are all other ways we can try and support children who are not performing as well as we would like. I think we need to work closely with City run programs, as roughly 50% of our children come from public housing, so ensuring that children have adequate nutrition, health care and supervised, constructive activities are also important.

- What policies or practices should be put in place to close the racial and ethnic achievement gaps that exist at CRLS?

After school and summer school opportunities are important. Also, outreach to families, tutoring, identifying needs and targeted plans to help children in areas that are difficult for them. We need to do more to strengthen College Prep classes at the high school, as well as ensure that there is more diversity in our Honors and AP classes.

- Where would you turn for expert advice when considering ways to narrow achievement gaps? Please give at least one example outside of the Cambridge Public School system.

Although we have quality people in the District, we can't be afraid to look outside of Cambridge. We have a tendency in Cambridge to be a bit provincial when it comes to looking at how other communities do things. This past April I attended the National School Board Association conference and heard how districts around the country were doing things to close the achievement gap, such as using technology in truly amazing ways. I forwarded this information on to the Supt for his review. We have three great teaching institutions in Harvard, Lesley and MIT right here in Cambridge that need to be tapped. We have Bob Moses who was a pioneer in Math education. Rich Weissbourd, a Cambridge resident and faculty member at the Harvard School of Education and the Kennedy School who does great work around closing the achievement gap. The list is long and we should be using all talents at our disposal.

Please describe your hands-on experience in working with students, and strategies you employed, that resulted in high achievement for all students, especially students who are typically described as in the achievement gap.

I work in a school. I am not a teacher, but I believe that my contribution to children's education is important. So, in my professional capacity, I help develop Individual Education Plans (IEP), goals, benchmarks and interventions for students. I work with teachers and parents to support students emotionally and academically. I help students, all of whom have special needs, with strategies to manage their anxiety and learning disabilities. I attend IEP meetings and advocate for services to help children.

I have worked for over 15 years with special needs children and in special education. I am the only serving School Committee member who actually works in a school. I have

seen first hand how MCAS testing and the achievement gap impacts some of our most vulnerable students. This is what I do everyday.

- At what point (meaning a time certain, months, years?) should we expect that the activities surrounding the IA will result in measurable gains in closing the achievement/opportunity gap?

I think that is hard to say. I would like to see results quickly, but the truth is you can't start closing the achievement gap in 6th grade. If we really want to close the gap it has to start far earlier. In 2010 I was appointed co-chair of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education and Care with City Councilor, Marjorie Decker. We worked with early childhood educators on ways to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of early childhood education and care in Cambridge. We are issuing our report on October 17, 2011. I truly believe that as a school district we have to work more closely with children, families and educators/providers, prior to children entering our district. So, do I think the IA will help close some of those gaps, yes, but I don't think it's going to be a magic bullet. The real strength of the IA is that it will prepare all of our students for high school in a way that we simply don't do at the moment.

- How can we close the achievement gap without lowering the standards for all students?

The achievement gap entered our vocabulary with MCAS. The goal of MCAS is to have all children proficient, so if the gap closes because now all of our students are in the "needs improvement" category, we have failed. The goal has to be to raise all children to proficient. As I have mentioned in other answers, that will mean offering more opportunities for our higher risk students, such as universal pre-school, after school and summer school, as well as targeted interventions, tutoring, professional development and improving our relationships with families.

Budget

- The current CPS budget is roughly \$140 million dollars. If you were required to cut the budget by 5%; i.e. eliminate roughly \$7 million dollars worth of costs, where would you cut? If you were allowed to increase our budget by \$7 million, what would you add?

I wouldn't look to cut the budget unless we have a shortfall, which we will. So, I want to fully evaluate programs in our District. Cambridge is great at starting things, less great at evaluating them, and dreadful and shutting them down if they aren't working. So, we need to get a handle on all the programs out there and their impact on teaching and learning. I would look at staffing and see if there are places where we can redistribute positions to make them more effective. I would also try and bring back students from charter schools as they cost the District \$7 million a year.

I know it would be more than \$7 million, but I would put that money into early childhood education. I would consider adding money to school improvement funds, expansion of co-teaching, improved technology (including training so teachers know how to use it), as well as social workers in the schools to support mental health and parent outreach.

- A recent letter in the *Cambridge Chronicle* claimed that “it has long been known to anyone who pays attention to these things that CPS spends too much on central administration.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why? Are there any changes you would like to see in the district-level staffing of CPS, either in terms of adding new roles or changing or omitting old roles?

I have been talking about this since I joined the Committee. When cuts to schools were being made on the very first budget I worked on as a School Committee member, I filed a motion to cut 1.3 million dollars from Central Administration and re-direct that money to the schools so that we would not have to make cuts in the classroom. That motion went down 5-2 (only Richard Harding voted with me. Please note it wasn't the current Committee. The other members at the time were: Fantini, Grassi, Lummis, Walser and Michael Sullivan as Mayor). If we had made those cuts, we still would have had a Central Administration 30% LARGER than any other school district our size.

Over the last few years we have made progress in this area, for example, those “teacher on assignment” positions that people used to talk about no longer exist. Please don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that people aren't working hard. The truth is we have a very antiquated system in Cambridge when it comes to technology, so there are areas where we need more people to do work that other districts do with technology. If we were at a point, as we were 10-15 years ago when we had enough money to do whatever we wanted, this may not be such a big deal, but if the decision comes down to cuts in the classroom or cuts in Central Administration, then I want to preserve as much financial support that goes to our children and teachers as possible.

- Probably the most important responsibility of the School Committee is to review and approve the budget that is proposed by the superintendent. If you were on the School Committee, what questions would you want the superintendent to address when he presents his budget proposal next spring?

We need to have a budget that is clear as to how our spending is going to support our goals. So my questions would be: How is this going to help achievement? How is this going to support students? How is this going to help teachers improve their craft? How is this going to support physically and emotionally healthy schools? Etc.

- What do you expect to be the most difficult budget issues the district will face in the next two years?

The full cost of the Innovation Agenda, capital projects, union negotiations, skyrocketing health care costs, just to name a few.

- Building and physical improvements will likely be phased differently for each of our schools. How do we make sure ALL schools are treated equitably, especially with regard to deferred maintenance?

The city has agreed to pay for renovating some of our schools, but the maintenance and minor renovations will need to be paid for by the District. We have a Building and Grounds subcommittee, and we had a Facilities Task Force, so we need look at their finding and ensure that we are prioritizing our physical improvements.

Motivation/Personality/Leadership Style

- What do you want to accomplish by becoming a School Committee member?

I want the Cambridge Public Schools to be a place where every child, regardless of race, class, gender, learning style or ability achieves at the highest level possible both academically and socially. I want our students to leave CPS prepared for whatever chapter is next in their lives, whether that is college or work. I want our students to be life-long learners, to be strong and active participants in their communities and be able to work and collaborate with anyone. As a School Committee member I will work with the Superintendent, my colleagues and the community to pass policies, budgets and goals to reach this end.

- What is the one issue related to CPS that you feel *most* passionately about that you will address and work on if you are on the SC?

I feel most passionately about creating a district where every child can succeed to their full potential. At this particular point in time, and more specifically, I am passionate about ensuring that the IA is implemented well and that it delivers on its promise.

- Describe a workplace situation when you disagreed with a colleague or superior about publicly advocating for an unpopular position. What was the result?

I have no problem with people disagreeing or publicly advocating for an unpopular decision. I think constructive and at times difficult, conversations are healthy and most often lead us to a better place. I think people need to be respectful, should keep an open mind, and should truly listen to one another, even if they don't agree.

- What is the most important characteristic you will bring to the School Committee if elected?

Levelheaded leadership. Although I am passionate about many things, I believe that I am a calm and collaborative presence on the Committee. I work well with all members, as well as the administration, I'm not afraid to take the lead on important and even controversial issues, and I put what I believe to be best for the District ahead of personal or political gain.

- What direct experience hiring, supervising, evaluating, and firing an employee or employees do you have? Please elaborate.

As the Director of Adoption at Cambridge Family and Children's Services, prior to my current work, I ran a state-wide, public adoption program for special needs children in the foster care system. While in this position I was director of the entire program, which consisted of four full time staff and several Master's level interns. I provided supervision and evaluation for all of these employees. Luckily, most of my staff was exceptional, but I was in the position of having to fire two employees over my three years in this position.

In addition, I have been on administrative teams at the Manville School and Farr Academy and have been involved in hiring, interviewing and evaluating staff.

SES Balance

- Should it be a primary goal of the school committee to see that all schools in Cambridge achieve an SES balance representing the city's population? Why or why not?

I think the diversity in our schools is one of our greatest qualities. I believe that our schools should be balanced because that is the world we live in and it is important for our students to learn how to work, learn, and live with people different from themselves. When I graduated from CRLS in 1987 there were 56 different nationalities represented in our school. As great an education I received from my teachers, learning along side so many different races, cultures, languages and religions, has been the greatest asset, not just personally but as a citizen of this community and the world.

- By what means should the school system pursue achieving SES balance in all of its schools? What specific changes should be made in the current policies regulating this?

We need to engage in a deliberate, thoughtful process of including the community, as well as experts, in deciding what our ultimate goal should be. If our goal is to have balanced schools, then that is going to lead to some very difficult decisions. It will likely mean getting rid of or dramatically lowering the +/- range in our schools, holding seats

despite waiting lists, and possibly the elimination of proximity preference. Of course, all of these would have to be discussed and debated before any such changes are instituted.

- Given that we know now that a significant SES imbalance will exist in the new middle schools — and a concern that this will perpetuate the uneven and unequal learning experiences across the district even with a more standardized curriculum — how would you suggest addressing this imbalance?

This is certainly going to be a challenge and is concerning. On paper, as it stands right now, two of the four campuses will be imbalanced. Now, some of that may change as these campuses form, but it is absolutely something that needs our careful attention. Some ways that these campuses may balance, for example, include the rise in lower income students attending the Montessori, and the likelihood that those students will attend the Vassell Lane Upper School, also, with a strong middle school program with larger cohorts, it is likely that many of the Morse School middle school students who leave Morse, will stay, helping to balance Putnam Ave. The truth is, there is no easy answer to this. What I can commit to is working to ensure that these campuses are balanced and that they are meeting the needs of all their students.

School Committee and Superintendent Roles

- What do you believe is the most fundamental responsibility of a School Committee member?

The most fundamental responsibility of the School Committee is to be overseers of the budget, to be community representatives, and to be supporting policies that achieve our goals.

- Describe how you expect to work with the Superintendent and how you would insure clear and accurate internal communication between the Superintendent and School Committee.

I work well with the Superintendent. I don't micro-manage but I have an open dialogue with Dr. Young and feel that I can make suggestions to him and ask him questions and receive timely responses. Each week we receive a document called "The Weekly" which is a write up by the Superintendent that tells us various things that are going on in the District, as well as providing us with information as to what is on the agenda for our next meeting. I have found this to be a great tool for internal communication, however, lately it has not been as informative as in the past. I very much want this document to be improved.

- What should the procedure be for deciding whether a school policy should be put before a vote of the School Committee?

I think we have to look at what the state laws and guidelines are and ensure that we are adhering to those as we move forward. Overall policy and financial issues are the responsibility of the School Committee and we should be voting on those matters in collaboration with the Superintendent and his recommendations.

- The School Committee is responsible for hiring and evaluating the district's superintendent. What do you think the role of the school superintendent should be in Cambridge? What qualities, abilities, and areas of expertise do you think are most important?

The role of the Superintendent is to be the educational leader of our district. He/she needs to be an experienced educator, who has vision, who knows how to collaborate, who isn't afraid to listen to others but is able to decide what he/she feels is best. The Superintendent should be someone who invests in knowing the community, who communicates well with not just the SC but with parents, teachers, business leaders etc. He/she needs to be informed of cutting edge educational practice, to make difficult decisions, to be a strong evaluator of abilities and be able to unite people behind his/her vision for the District.

- Some people feel that SC members are elected primarily to represent the wishes of Cambridge residents—what they want for their schools; others feel that they are elected primarily to exercise their own good judgment about policy decisions. As a School Committee member, how would you think about these two potentially conflicting roles? What would you do if you felt that what the majority of residents wanted was not what you felt was best for the schools?

My role on the School Committee is both. I need, and always do, listen to residents, weigh out various opinions and in the end make the decision that I feel is best for the District. At times this is a conflict. For example, many of my supporters did not want me to vote for the IA, however, after carefully evaluating this issue, I came to believe that the IA would move our District to a better place. In the end, I must do what I think is best, even if that is costly to me politically. I cannot promise that we will always agree. If people think that they will always agree with anyone, then they will forever be disappointed. What I can promise is that I will serve with integrity and honesty, that I will work hard, that I will put the best interest of the children first, and that I will be open minded and listen to all.

- Aside from the Innovation Agenda and the high school renovation, what do you think is the most positive change the current administration has made in the past three years?

I think doing away with the unethical practice of forcing our students in self-contained classrooms to move schools every few years is a significant and important accomplishment. This practice has been going on for years and it is incredibly hurtful to those children. I am very proud that this administration took this on and made this change. In fact, although we still have a great deal of work to do, the commitment made to improving special education services since the arrival of Dr. Young has been tremendous.

- Give several specific examples of issues related to the Innovation Agenda that a) the School Committee should decide by vote and b) the Superintendent is entitled to decide without a vote by the committee.

This is a slippery slope. I understand the push of some to want to vote on each aspect of the IA but we must weigh that against slowing down the process and micro-managing the Superintendent. I think the Committee should vote the overall guidelines to provide direction but the Superintendent needs to work out the details with the teachers and administration, as is their job.

- School committee members often refer to Superintendent Young as the district's "educational leader," indicating that they trust him to decide on how to design and implement the Innovation Agenda. Are there educational issues relating to the Innovation Agenda that you feel school committee members should vote on even if that vote might go against the Superintendent's recommendation? If so, please give an example.

The Superintendent in any community is the "educational leader" whether he/she is trusted or not. My view of Dr. Young, is that he was brought here because of his vast experience in running other successful districts. In fact, many who are now upset with the IA are the very people who advocated for his hire. So, do I trust him: "yes". Does that mean that I always agree with him or think the SC shouldn't provide oversight: "no."

I guess I would have to see what educational recommendations the superintendent made before I can say if I would vote for it or against it. What I can say is that the SC's job is to set the overall district policy and it is the Supt's job to make educational decisions. If I don't agree or like one of his decisions then I will ask him for his rationale, I will investigate it myself, I will talk with others, and if still not convinced, then I will use

whatever parliamentary process I need to in order to make a change. For example, when the decision was made to move the 18-22 year old special needs students from CRLS to Upton St. during renovations, away from their services, supports, and internships, I attempted to work with the administration to keep them at the high school. After several conversations and no progress, I filed a motion to keep those children at CRLS and it passed. I am not afraid to take a stance and to go against the administration if necessary, however, for SC members to be obstructionist, distrusting and micro-managing only stifles our progress and hurts our students.

- If you find yourself in disagreement with the Superintendent please describe how you see your role, how you would proceed. Please give examples, if possible.

Please see above answer. People are going to disagree. That doesn't mean that they are incompetent, or don't care. It just means that they don't see eye to eye on a particular issue. I have disagreed with the Superintendent. Mostly, I try to resolve those disagreements off of the floor. I don't think its always necessary to make a "public show" that only serves to alienate people. The Superintendent and I have many conversations during the week and I have found him to be responsive to my feedback. If, in the end, as stated above, we disagree and I feel strongly about my position, I will bring the issue up on the floor and appeal to my colleagues for support.

- What do you think about having terms limits for School Committee members?

I don't believe in term limits. We have two-year terms in Cambridge, which is actually problematic. If you look back at the last several School Committee elections, we have turned over two members and the Mayor, making three out of seven new members every two years. That is extremely inconsistent and does not lead to a highly functioning elected body. We have a democratic process in place where the voters go to the polls every two years and have the option to vote in or out anyone they choose.

Parent/Community Role and Communication

- It is often said that good schools have a lot of family engagement. What does family engagement mean to you at the district level and at the level of individual schools? What are appropriate ways that parents/guardians can be involved, and what are inappropriate ways?

To me, family engagement means that parents/guardians have an open line of communication to teachers and administration, and that people feel welcomed and supported in their child's school. I feel the same about the District level. Families should

feel respected and safe to express their views and they should expect answers to their questions. This does not mean that the school/district and the family will always agree, but there needs to be a respectful culture.

Appropriate ways for parents to be involved include meeting with teachers and administrators, taking active roles in their child's learning, helping with events and projects, being members of school councils and/or outreach committees, speaking with new parents, being classroom leaders and many other ways.

- Often, the same voices are heard on a range of school issues. Describe how you go about gathering information from families of children in the district's schools who are not proactively contacting you and aren't part of your personal network?

This is about outreach. I often seek out people who are not "regulars" at meetings or list serves. I have help meetings/events in public housing to make it easier for folks to meet and talk. I have always been willing to meet with anyone, anywhere, anytime. Accessibility is a key part of being a school committee member.

- Please give specific examples of ways the district can and should communicate effectively with families, including non-native English speakers and those who do not use the Internet.

First we need to make sure that all documents are translated into different languages. We need to provide options on our Connect Ed calls for other languages. We need to make schools more welcoming by staying open later. I have long advocated for social workers to work 12-8 shifts so they can meet with families in the evenings, at their homes, to make it easier for families to be involved. We should have child care available at SC meetings. We need to do better outreach in communities and hear from them, what we can do to communicate better.

- Do you believe parents should be on the hiring committees for the Upper School deans or principals? If not, why not? If so, why, and what role should they play?

I think they should be. I think we should follow the same process we do for hiring teachers and principals.

- What do you believe should be the role of the Citywide School Advisory Group? Should their meetings — including the agenda and minutes—be accessible to the public?

I think this group has a significant role to play in our district. I think they can serve as a committee that helps communication between schools, that can advocate for all schools

with both the administration and SC, and that can help identify district wide needs. Yes, of course, their minutes and agenda should be available to the public.

Ability Grouping

I'm going to wrap all of these up into one answer. I have not thought of a way that ISP can continue under the IA in its current form. I think to have a magnet program that pulls children from "feeder" schools to specific campuses would undermine the new structure. With that said, in NO WAY am I saying that the needs of accelerated learners are not important. Of course they are important.

If ISP does not continue, then I have been clear with the Superintendent that he will need to outline a detailed and research supported plan on how the needs of these children will be met at the Upper Schools. It isn't enough to just say that "we'll do it", he will need to show us how we will do it and how it will be an improvement on what is going on now. Maybe that is co-teachers in all middle grade classes, combined with specific professional development. Maybe it's an "embedded honors" option as they have at the high school. But he will need to be very clear on how the needs of these children are going to be met, just like he needs to be clear on how the needs of all children are going to be met.

I think everyone has a definition of "tracking" or "ability grouping". For me, "tracking," means having leveled classes where children are segregated by ability and they are kept on those tracks. I do not support this. "Ability grouping", to me, means having children of different abilities in the same class but having different groups within that class based on ability. I think this can work. It also makes it easier for students to be "fluid" between groups because it doesn't involve a change of schedule, having to move to a different room etc. They can simply slide from one group to the next based on what is most appropriate for them.

I think the question "How does the concept of challenging each student to achieve his/her best align with another Cambridge Public School claim of holding all students to the same standard?" is a bit misleading. I don't think anyone is saying that "holding all students to the same standard" means not challenging students. The reality is, some students are more proficient in some areas than others, the goal is to get all students to be proficient, but even if we do that, there will always be some variance.

I can't imagine that anyone on the SC or administration would say that telling a student who is progressing more quickly that they should go off in a corner and do an extra worksheet, is acceptable. We clearly need to address their needs, but I believe that with the proper support and training it can be done in a heterogeneous class. I also believe that heterogeneous classes are what the world is really all about. None of us work in jobs where everyone is on the same level. We need to learn how to collaborate with others, how to work with others, how to sometimes be a leader, and sometimes be a follower.

Assessment and Data

- CPS gathers a lot of data on attendance, suspensions, grades, test scores, course selections, etc., but little of it seems analyzed and used for data-drive decision-making. What ideas do you have for how the district can better learn from the information it gathers every year on students, teachers, budget, administrators, and schools?

I guess I'm not sure that I would agree that this data isn't being used for decision making. How do people think the administration is making decisions? Of course they are looking at data. Now, could we look at it more effectively, are we looking at the "right" data, those are great questions. I also think that we are in a culture where everything is "data, data, data", but that can be a challenge as well. How do you interpret the data? We can all spin data to look anyway we want, so how do we ensure the data is valid?

I think data that is specific to each child is important. I know that there was a lot of resistance from some schools about the District-Wide Assessments, and unfortunately not all schools are implementing them as they should be, but I find these very useful to help teachers and parents identify the specific needs of their children *at that moment so they can adjust instruction*. That is key. Getting MCAS results 6 months after a child has left a teachers class doesn't help much. So, child specific, "in the moment" data to adjust instruction is important.

- As a School Committee member, you will need information about our students, schools, staff, and families to make policy decisions. If you, as a School Committee member, had the money to commission one substantial research study related to CPS, what question would you want to have answered? What information do you feel you don't have now to make sound policy?

I would want a study on the effectiveness of programs/ teaching methods in regard to student success. I would use this information to guide the budget process so that we can expand what is working and discontinue what is not, allowing us to use those funds in a more effective way.

- What are your views on "data-based decision-making" and program evaluation research? How much research should we be conducting on CPS programs and who should conduct and evaluate that research?

Every few years there are words/phrases that become popular and they roll off the tongue without much in-depth thought. "Data-based decision-making" has become one of those phrases. We all say it as if there is a common understanding of what it means, that we all agree on the type of data to be used and as if we will all agree on what the data shows. That just isn't the case. Of course, when making a decision you want it based on

something, but in the end, you can make data look almost anyway you want. So, when it comes to programs, I would want to look at, did a student's grades improve, are they finding school more enjoyable and less frustrating, are they able to take on greater challenges, have their test scores improved, what are the long range outcomes (do they take honors/AP classes in high school, do they go on to college, are they prepared for college etc). As far as who should conduct this research, depending on what you want to use as your outcomes, much of the information is likely gathered by the District already, thus the evaluation can be done in-house. There may be some research that would require an outside evaluation and we should do that if necessary.

- In addition to MCAS results, what other metrics or approaches do you think should be used to gauge how well our schools are doing?

See above.

- The School Committee has a process for annually assessing the performance of the superintendent. How should Cambridge residents annually assess the performance of the School Committee and of the individual members? What measures should be used to measure members' effectiveness beyond assessing school and student performance? Should improvements in MCAS scores be one of those measures?

Like any elected position, people need to decide if they feel that their elected representatives are working hard, honest, and making decisions that they feel are benefiting their populations. What is challenging with School Committee is that having elections every two years is not always enough time to assess how decisions work out, so there is a tendency to focus on one vote, or one decision, and judge someone based on that. You have to look at the persons "body of work", will they/do they stand up for the values you believe it, do they work well with other members on the Committee and the administration, do they offer valid points (even if you don't agree), do they make their decisions based on what they believe is best for the district.

I have said this many times during this election, I cannot promise you that we will always agree, in fact, I can promise you that we won't, but I what I can promise you is that you will not find someone who works harder or cares more about this community and our children, then me, and I hope that people judge me on my work and not one decision where we may disagree. For example, I am going to work hard to help President Obama get re-elected, but I certainly have not agreed with everything he has done, but in the end, I know that he will represent my interests better then others in the race, and that he has a very complicated job but that his motives are one's I can get behind.

Big Educational Themes

- What do you think should be the most important goals of a CPS education? What should a CPS diploma mean to the outside world?

The most important goals of a CPS education should include ensuring that every student graduates with the academic and social skills needed to help them be a success in whatever they chose to do in the future. Some students will go on to college, some will work, some will enter the trades or military, whatever it is, we need to make sure that our students are prepared. A CPS diploma should tell the world that our graduates are well-rounded, educated and prepared citizens who will be successful.

- We often ask the question: Why is achievement in CPS so low, given the academic, cultural, and business resources of this city? In what ways do you think we effectively draw on the resources of Cambridge now for our public schools? Are there other ways we could be taking advantage of the city to increase achievement in our schools?

In some ways we draw on our outside resources and in some ways we don't. That is the problem. Everything is haphazard. If a particular school can get a grant or build a partnership, great, they do it, but that doesn't mean that it is expanded to all schools. We have dozens and dozens of partnerships. It makes a great list, but are they effective? Should they be expanded? Should they be stopped? Those are important questions.

I think we need to do more around early childhood education if we are truly going to close the achievement gap in a sustainable way. As the co-chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education and Care, with City Councilor, Marjorie Decker, we met with the local universities and business community to build partnerships with them for early childhood education. We had some immediate success as many businesses will contribute to support a series of trainings for early care providers to improve the quality of early education children receive. We also received a commitment to start a pilot program between the school department and the city-run pre-schools to help ease the transition from pre-school to kindergarten and to have these educators work together to improve childrens' preparedness for school. These are tangible results that we believe will help improve achievement.

- One of the great strengths of our school system is the diversity of students that attend every school in system. How does CPS currently help students learn and benefit from that diversity? Are there ways we can take more advantage of our diversity?

Some of the way CPS helps students learn and benefit from our diversity, is simply by having diverse schools. Going to school for several hours a day with peers who are of different races, cultures, languages, learning styles, economic backgrounds etc. allows students to learn from and become friends with others who they may not otherwise come in contact with in their daily lives. When I look back on my CPS education, this is one of

the greatest benefits. I learned how to collaborate with, feel comfortable with, respect and trust people who are different from me in many ways. This has helped me tremendously in my life. It wasn't a "diversity lesson" or "diversity day" as you see in other communities, it was my life. It was what I experienced every day.

- Where should CPS be looking for new ideas to ensure that our schools are always offering programs that are rigorous, innovative, and at the cutting edge?

Historically, we have had tendency in Cambridge to be very provincial. If we didn't think of it then it must not be good. We have slowly moved away from that as we have brought in superintendents from other communities who come to Cambridge with experience from outside our city. Things like block scheduling, Developmental Design, AVID, Response To Intervention, for example, are all programs that have been successful elsewhere and we have incorporated them in Cambridge with very positive results.

As in any profession, you can't be isolated. You have to look at what is happening nationally and internationally and determine if they would work in your district "as is" or with modification.

Other

- Is bullying a problem in schools in our district? If so, do you have ideas about how to help schools and teachers address this problem?

Yes. Bullying is a problem everywhere. I have done a great deal of work on this as a Committee member and in my profession. The answer isn't to simply "punish" children. You must create an atmosphere in schools that is healthy and respectful. You have to provide consistent messages regarding expectations. You can't overreact to situations. You have to have dialogue between students and between students and staff. You have to teach social-emotional health starting in kindergarten. You need to find the root causes of both the aggressor's behavior and the target's behavior.

Specific professional development for teachers is important. Programs like Responsive Classroom and Developmental Design are important (although there are many others). I would like to see our PE classes be learning opportunities through cooperative games, where children can get exercise but also learn how to work together, communicate and reach a common goal. I helped start the Peer Mediation Program in the elementary schools in 1994. We have continued this at the high school but not in the elementary schools, I would bring this back.

At the end of the day, we are never going to eliminate conflict. However, with the right supports in place, we can create a more healthy environment where we can deal with that conflict in a way that we truly resolve the issue and create a more supportive school.

- What should be done with the student who consistently disrupts the class, impacting the learning of the other students?

For most students, not all, if the curriculum is engaging and interesting they won't disrupt class. For those who do, you need to work with the child and his/her parents/guardian to figure out what the issue is and how best to resolve. There needs to be flexibility. If you have a child who, despite everyone's best efforts, cannot be successful in a class then you may need to consider a smaller, more structured setting to better meet that child's needs.

- What are the specific professional development requirements that you would advocate for teachers at the 6-8 level who have generally not had the support for professional development typical in Cambridge for the lower elementary grades?

To be honest, I want the teachers to answer this question. We need to hear from them what they need to improve their craft. It isn't for the School Committee to swoop in from above and say "You will take this training and this workshop". That is not the way to get the best results. So, I guess my answer is talk to the teachers. See what they want/need and let's make sure they get it.

- Attracting teachers of color is a challenge to many school systems, but we're not doing it well. How can we improve our staff diversity?

We aren't doing well by our standards, but we are doing much better than most other districts. Some of this has to do with small candidate pools (nationally and locally). We need to do a better job of recruiting. We have some schools where the balance is way off, so we should be encouraging applicants of color to apply to those schools that have consistently not been successful in hiring a diverse population. We should be looking at providing tuition reimbursement for our teaching assistants, many of whom are people of color, so they can go back to school and earn their degrees, with the understanding that in exchange for the financial help they will work in the District for a period of time (other professions, like the Department of Children and Families, do this successfully). We have to continue to hold to our goal and not be complacent.