

Questions for School Committee Candidates Forum
October 13, 2011

Thank you for organizing the the Candidate's Forum.
Here is a little bit about me and why I am running for re-election to the Cambridge School Committee, as well as where I stand on the issues.

My name is Nancy Tauber, and I live in Cambridgeport with my husband Tony and our two sons, Jonah and Isaac (5th and 8th graders at Graham and Parks).

Tony and I send our children to public schools because we believe they are one of the best places where people can learn to work together and become responsible citizens.

I have spent my entire adult life involved in public school education. Before serving on the School Committee I taught middle school social studies in the Newton Public Schools for 12 years.

As a member of the School Committee, I have served on the Healthy Children Task Force, Kids' Council, School Climate committee, the Middle School Blue Ribbon Commission. I have Co-Chaired and Chaired the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth, as well as the Budget, Facilities, Governance, Curriculum & Achievement, Superintendent's Evaluation and Superintendent's Transition committees. And perhaps most importantly, I have tried my best to listen to all of you and the other stakeholders in Cambridge.

I am running for re-election to continue working to help improve the quality of our public schools and make sure all children have the chance to become well-educated, engaged, and productive citizens. My goal is to ensure **that we have the most caring and highest quality teachers, the most supportive and strong leadership, and academic success for every student.**

Academic excellence is and always will be the most important issue facing our schools. However, the implementation of the IA is clearly where we must focus our attention right now.

The Innovation Agenda must deliver on its promise to create a more engaging and enriching experience for all students so they are prepared to excel in high school and beyond. This a great opportunity for our students, teachers, families and the community to create something truly spectacular.

Because of my background in teaching, as well as my experience on the SC, I know what questions to ask. When the administration shows us the schedule, the academic framework, assessments, curriculum, I know from first hand experience what works.

I believe the School Committee is stronger with my teaching experience, my understanding of Cambridge, and my ability and dedication to collaborate, listen, learn and make decisions for the betterment of our children.

I hope I can continue to represent and serve the wonderful students and families of Cambridge. In order to do so, I am asking all of you for your #1 vote on Nov. 8th.

For more information about me and learn why your # 1 vote is so important, please visit my website

www.nancytauber.org

CURRICULUM/AUTONOMY/ALIGNMENT - There should be a common vision for the school district and each individual school should adopt their own mission with the district vision in mind. There should be some consistency in WHAT is being taught among our schools so that everyone is prepared to come together at CRLS; however, HOW it is taught should be determined at the school level, and principals and teachers should be provided the support, resources, time and freedom to be able to create enriching and engaging opportunities for their students.

Teachers do not go into education to follow a script or administer a series of tests. It is my experience and observation that students will learn much more if they are engaged, challenged, and invested in the curriculum with strong and well-supported teachers. Our administrators need to make sure our teachers have the time and resources necessary to incorporate creativity, alternatives, and enrichment into their classroom curriculum, where our children participate in a dynamic learning environment and thus a higher quality education. The School Committee must establish policies and adopt a budget that reflects this vision, as well as hold the Superintendent accountable for achieving these collective goals.

INNOVATION AGENDA - I believe we need a person on the School Committee with middle school experience, an understanding of Cambridge, the issues, the challenges and the opportunities, as well as the ability to collaborate. The process must be comprehensive with input from all stakeholders in the schools and the community. We must make sure all children have a robust social network, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and the best teachers.

This age group is capable of so much; therefore, we must have the highest expectations of them, as well as ourselves. All our middle school students deserve an enriching and engaging academic and social experience that prepares them to excel in high school and beyond.

The Innovation Agenda provides an excellent opportunity to create an improved learning and teaching environment for our middle-grade students, teachers, staff administrators, and community members. With the Innovation Agenda, we will get

another opportunity to really get to know your kids and for them to get to know one another before they launch into high school.

As a successful collaborator on the School Committee with middle school experience and an understanding of the issues, challenges, and opportunities that are unique to Cambridge; I will continue to:

- Ensure that our Upper School Campuses are places where every child is known, nurtured and challenged;
- Make sure our teachers are empowered and provided with the necessary time, resources, and support;
- Support educational leadership at the middle school level for the first time in our city's history;
- Foster meaningful family engagement;
- Be an advocate for equity;
- Hold our Superintendent and his team accountable to the benchmarks we have set;
- Responsibly manage the budget
- Demand that all changes meet our high expectations.

ACHIEVEMENT

Academic excellence is and always will be the most important issue facing our schools. Here are some suggestions:

Early Childhood Education - We need to make sure all children are prepared to learn on the very first day of school. No system can do it alone, and it is important that the Cambridge Public Schools work with city agencies and community partners to address the needs of our families before they enter our schools.

Enrichment Programs - One of the goals of the Innovation Agenda is to establish consistent start and end times for the 4 Upper School Campuses creating unprecedented opportunities for out-of-school time programming for middle-grade students. For the first time, 6th, 7th and 8th graders from across Cambridge will be able to come together for academic, athletic, artistic, and community service activities. We will have the capacity to develop and offer a more diverse set of high quality enrichment activities.

Teacher Evaluations and Performance Measures - The most important part of any school is its teachers. Excellent teachers need meaningful professional development, useful evaluations, and supportive teaching environments. They also need many opportunities and time to share best practices with colleagues.

All over Massachusetts, including Cambridge, teachers are retiring and leaving the profession. Especially now, the Cambridge Public Schools need to be proactive in retaining teachers and hiring excellent new teachers from diverse backgrounds. The best way to keep new teachers is to provide them with helpful and supportive mentors. Teaching can be isolating; therefore, we need to continue striving for a

structure that provides time for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other.

Excellent teachers love teaching, have high expectations for their students, and believe all kids can achieve academic success. They build safe and respectful classroom communities and work well with students, families, administrators, and other colleagues. This is a challenging task, which is why our teachers deserve expert supervision, meaningful feedback, appreciation and respect. Teachers need to know their strengths and work with other professionals to grow and improve. Administrators must understand what constitutes superior teaching practices, and they need the time to complete their evaluations and have the support to make tough decisions when necessary. Fortunately, we have a very good working relationship with the Cambridge Teacher's Association, and as a member of the School Committee I will continue to support that relationship.

Measuring Student Achievement - Test scores don't tell the whole story, and many highly esteemed educators have spoken out against the limitations of test scores as adequate measures of learning. Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of skills through creative writing, poetry, essay writing, art projects, public speaking, drama, and music. We need to foster other ways of assessing our children that incorporate the multiple intelligences and prepare them for a world which sorely needs problem solvers, collaborators, critical thinkers, and creative people.

Family Engagement - It is important that every school and the school system as a whole continues to work diligently to figure out ways to outreach to families in a meaningful way, especially families who are not engaged or connected to the schools and their children's education. The school department has begun working with the city's Community Engagement Team and Karen Mapp (author of [Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships](#)). There is a direct correlation between family involvement in schools and academic achievement, and I will continue to support policies and funding necessary to increase family engagement.

BUDGET

I am proud of my work as a Budget Co-Chair for the FY2010 budget and a member of the Budget Committee for the past 4 budget cycles. It is important that the School Committee works closely with the administration on a thoughtful, transparent and inclusive budget process, and during my time on the Committee we have worked hard to make the process more open and transparent, as well as create a budget document that is more user-friendly. When constituents know how dollars are being allocated, then we can work together to ensure sound expenditures will improve achievement for all our students.

Cutting millions of dollars from any budget causes a great deal of frustration and divisiveness within a community; however, we must be prepared and willing to

prioritize and work together. If re-elected, I promise to push for this type of communication and collaboration to continue.

We need to make sure that the school budget remains focused directly on improving teaching and learning. We need to spend money where it will have the most impact - the classroom.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES - I believe the Superintendent must work with his leadership team and principals to determine how resources are going to be allocated. It is difficult to determine who should be getting more resources and even more difficult to determine who should be getting less, and, as a result, schools are often pitted against each other. For instance, we know there is a direct correlation between family involvement in schools and academic achievement. However, some of our schools have more family involvement than others. There must be enough flexibility and cooperation in the system so that principals in schools with very little family involvement have the resources to engage with all families, especially families who are not engaged or connected to the schools. Now is not the time for divisiveness.

CONTROLLED CHOICE POLICY

Our system of choice is challenging, complicated and messy, but I believe we can improve it, and I am committed to this work. Without choice our families would not have the option to send their children to a Montessori school, an Extended Learning Day school, a Dual Immersion school, etc...

One of the strengths of the Cambridge Public School System is that controlled choice allows families' access to twelve unique elementary schools in Cambridge. Equally important is that there be consistency and commonality between these twelve learning communities. I will advocate maintaining a balance between a unified school system and individual identities for each of our twelve elementary schools. To insure excellence for our children, we need a balance of these two.

However, we are faced with many challenges because of our Controlled Choice Policy. We are a community that values both diversity and choice. Yet we often face a dilemma because when families are given a choice as to what school they want their children to attend, the results are all too often schools that are not diverse. We have to address these very important and sensitive issues. Here are just a few:

- Some of our schools are under-chosen;
- Too many families are either forced to choose a mandatory placement or leave the Cambridge Public Schools;
- Several schools have open seats for paying lunch students and a waiting list for free and reduced lunch students, while other schools have open seats for free and reduced lunch students and a waiting list for paying lunch students;
- There might be a socio-economic balance in the lower grades of our elementary schools, but there is less diversity in the upper grades.

- We have dual language immersion programs (Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish), and we must figure out how to support these programs.

It is important that the next School Committee continue to work with the administration and the community to tackle these complicated and sensitive issues.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND SUPERINTENDENT ROLE

The role of the School Committee is to achieve real school improvement by developing a clear and compelling vision with the administration, which must be clearly communicated so that everyone understands the expectations and criteria for evaluation. The School Committee is then responsible for holding the Superintendent accountable for making sure the vision becomes a reality, as well as adopting a budget and monitoring progress that ensure we reach our goals.

School Committee members, administrators, and staff must communicate openly and work with each other and the community to achieve our common goals. Divisive politics, micromanaging and personality conflicts have no place in an effective school system. The leadership of any organization sets the tone that makes the organization successful. For sustained progress in the schools, the School Committee must be a positive force for change, develop shared priorities, and work together to ensure an excellent education for all.

ABILITY GROUPING

I would argue that all children have special needs - some can't read, some can't sit still, some pick up information very quickly, some can easily write well-organized essays, some are many grade levels behind, some are many grade levels ahead, some have no problem making friends, and some do. So how teachers meet the needs of all students is the issue we must address. We have to work together to figure out how to have strong inclusive communities and make sure kids aren't frustrated.

Fortunately, since Jeff Young's arrival, he has talked a great deal about the Cambridge Public Schools need to embrace a culture of high expectations and raising the bar. I believe this is the conversation we should be having. I think the School Committee needs to work with the Superintendent and his team to clearly communicate that compelling vision and make it become a reality. It is really challenging work, but we have to do it. In order to do so, the School Committee must hold the Superintendent accountable and adopt a budget and set policies that ensure we reach our goals. Yes, it is important that our goal is to make sure all kids are challenged, but the hard part is actually doing it.

The School Committee has asked the Superintendent to recommend an Academic Challenge policy for the IA. We are having a Roundtable meeting in November to review the recommendations. So what I can say for sure right now is that teachers, coaches, coordinators, principals and administrators are working on it together - another first for CPS.

As for the specifics, here is what I think are some of the possibilities for the new Upper Schools Campuses:

- 88 kids per grade will give teachers the flexibility to group and regroup their students during the day, the week, and the entire year. There should be opportunities for kids who are ready for Algebra 1 and Geometry to work with other kids who are strong in math. Also, kids should be working with kids who do not have similar strengths and interests. Our number one priority must be to meet the needs of each student. In my opinion, public schools are places where kids learn to read, write, spell, add, subtract, etc... , and they are also one of the best places for kids to learn how to work together and become well-rounded, responsible citizens.
- An advisory program where students can have a relationship with an adult who knows that child and can help that child figure out what they need to do to take it to the next level. Ultimately, this will help kids take ownership of their learning and gain independence before high school.
- More opportunities for performance assessments where kids are individually challenged (monologues, democracy symposium, science fairs, etc...). Set the bar higher so that kids can graduate with distinction. Many schools do 8th grade portfolios, but they can be more meaningful and the whole process can start in 6th grade (or younger).
- Facing History and Ourselves (<http://www.facing.org/>) is a wonderful program that engages kids in a way that is amazing.
- CPS is also working with Expeditionary Learning (<http://elschools.org/>), and they really know how to do differentiated instruction and project-based learning well.
- Technology can also help us meet the needs of those who are ready for more. The math department started using RM technology, a math software program that is used with the interactive whiteboards. Some teachers have received professional development in this technology to help them differentiate by designing advanced lessons and support lessons.
- The fact that 6th, 7th and 8th graders will be getting out of school at the same time, there will be more opportunities for out of school time programming, so that kids could get together for academic, athletic, artistic and community services activities.
- There will also be more opportunities for teachers to create Professional Learning Communities. If teachers have time to meet with each other and talk about kids and teaching, they will be able to figure out how to differentiate instruction better. Teachers need opportunities to expand their

repertoire.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Bullying is an issue for everyone – the victims, victimizers and bystanders. I believe this school committee takes this issue very seriously. One of our top priorities is to ensure a safe, nurturing and healthy school environment.

Research shows that safe schools help students achieve more academically and have better social skills, teachers are more effective and offer higher quality instruction, and children feel part of a community and more positive about school.

Over the past couple of years, more and more teachers have been trained in *Developmental Design* and *Responsive Classroom*. These programs have received positive feedback, and we need to continue monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness. We also need to continue to identify places in the required curriculum where social and emotional skills can be taught. It is hard work, but it needs to be done.

As a School Committee representative to the city's Healthy Children Task Force, a coalition devoted to promoting children's health in Cambridge, I have seen how this task force uses prevention strategies and existing community resources to enhance and link programs in areas such as mental health, physical health, violence prevention, and safe schools.

In these extremely difficult economic times, I will continue to advocate for strengthening the partnership between the schools and the work of the Healthy Children Task Force, as well as continue to support prevention and intervention programs that help our students stay or get healthy (mentally and physically). If you come to school sick, scared, tired, abused, hungry, or depressed, you will not be able to succeed. The community needs to support the "whole child and family" both in and out of school.

The good news is Cambridge has small schools, so teachers can get to know their students individually, culturally, developmentally and academically. It is the responsibility of the adults to make sure that kids are respectful and respected in the classroom, as well as in the hallways, bathrooms, playgrounds and cafeterias. Every adult in the building should take responsibility for every child in the school. This effort must be a priority for the entire community – teachers, administrators, families and students. It is with great pride that I am a member of a school committee that adopted a system-wide goal that ensures a safe, nurturing and healthy school environment.