

In its Candidate Guide questionnaire, Brookline's League of Women Voters asked:

"Please outline your approach to ensuring transparent communication with the public regarding curriculum and budget decisions."

I answered:

If you follow the Brookline schools Facebook group with more than 5,000 members, or the town wide group with nearly 10,000, you've seen my efforts at casting sunlight on curriculum and budget decisions for more than a decade.

I am well known for asking great - sometimes tough – questions, and pursuing satisfactory answers, whether on social media or in committee and subcommittee meetings.

Because I'm committed to critical thinking, I seek out facts; I want to see a thing from all directions. I believe the public is entitled to this same level of information, and I've often brought matters to public attention that had been flying under the radar.

For example, we recently saw two difficult issues – BHS unleveling and the elimination of elementary World Language- that illustrate the need for better information-giving and public engagement.

On unleveling: with other parents, I helped look into what BHS and district leadership was doing, marshaled public opinion, and successfully advocated for a pause on unleveling while a data-driven evaluation is developed. And on World Language: I asked the School Committee and School Department for clear information about new initiatives, administrative positions and other discretionary spending *added* in recent years, while the district was building the case that World Language can no longer fit.

These were both issues that affected Brookline students across the board, and yet little effort had been made to inform families of the impending changes and ask for feedback.

Our School Committee must give the public clear information about curriculum and budget decisions in order to build a robust, fact-based understanding of the district's choices. This kind of transparency is foundational to safeguarding trust and ongoing support. It also takes time and effort, which I've already shown that I'm willing to invest.

If elected to School Committee, I would be committed to:

1) Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes. This means proactively seeking community input through in-person / Zoom forums, Q&As, surveys, social media, and other methods. It also means integrating community values and feedback into curriculum and budget decisions.

2) Providing clear and detailed information about the school budget development and choices. This would include publishing more specific inputs. For example, what exactly does a 211% increase in Professional Development over two years represent? How much of our increased personnel spending each year is non-contractual / discretionary?

It would also mean providing absolute transparency about budget additions (not just proposed cuts in a given year) and giving multi-year look-backs at the time each new budget is proposed, so we can understand trends and the compounding impact of recent choices. Stakeholders want and deserve to understand exactly where tax dollars are going, as well as the ideological and practical direction of the district.

3) Ensuring the district makes direct connections between proposed investments- especially in staff and curriculum- and educational goals; and that there is a plan to evaluate progress toward those goals. Brookline residents want to know the rationale that drives School Department decisions, the meaning and impact of decisions, and how success is being measured.

I believe a municipality's leadership must provide this level of information to earn and maintain public support. We need only look at Newton, where the public rejected an operating override last year and then endured a painful teacher strike this year, to see the serious effects of eroding public confidence.

If elected to School Committee, I would bring this perspective on good government to bear in service to the district. I'm not here to rubber-stamp or go along to get along. Transparency and open, civil discourse work for all of us in the long run, and I'm a candidate who is committed to our long-term viability as a town. I'm running as a good governance candidate because our school system relies on public support, and I want our schools, and town, to thrive.