

Barb Fletcher

1. Are you prepared to implement the Loker partial closure or do you want to see the decision reopened?

I see no reason to open dialog about this decision again. I understand that this decision has created difficulties for many families, particularly in the Loker community. After weeks of thorough review of information, several public forums and extended public comment periods, and countless hours of work individually, as well as deliberation as a committee, I am confident that consolidating the elementary schools at this time is in the best interest of the district. The Administration, teachers, PTOs are tirelessly working together to help the students and families make this a smooth transition. Families will know by late April/early May as to which school their child will attend in the fall and will know which classroom and teacher they will have by the end of the current school year. There will be activities throughout the next few months to introduce the families and students to their new schools, including ice cream socials and open houses.

2. What, if any, alternatives to the Loker partial closure should have been considered?

I believe the decision to move to a 2 ½ school consolidation represents the best balance between providing a high quality educational program and recognizing the fiscal constraints facing the town. The 2 ½ school consolidation, in light of declining enrollment, allows the district to retain teachers, maintain the average class size across the district and continue current programs and services, while achieving cost savings. This change would have taken place the following year and is an example of the work our committee has done to reduce ongoing operating expenses. When 80% of the school budget's expenses are personnel related, \$400,000 in savings cannot otherwise be found without negatively impacting the educational program.

3. Are there any other school planning initiatives that you would like to see changed or begun?

I would like to see the School Committee continue its current progress on three important initiatives:

1. the Long Range Strategic Planning effort we began two years ago,
2. the ongoing efforts to find a solution for the High School facility and
3. the implementation of the recommendations of the technology audit.

In addition, I would like to consider the Administration's evaluation of certain key initiatives including closing the achievement gap, greening of the schools, introducing a Chinese program, and placing greater emphasis on health and wellness as part of the physical education program.

4. Do you support the current class size guidelines? Do you believe class size matters?

I believe class size is important and I support the current class size guidelines. Although the research on this topic is not entirely conclusive and depends on many variables, smaller class sizes, particularly in the early grades have proven beneficial. As I believe that teacher quality is the most important determining factor in a student's experience, teachers do find advantages to having smaller class sizes. They allow for fewer disciplinary issues and provide more opportunities for individualized attention and assessment, differentiated curriculum development, and focused time on learning.

5. Do you support METCO, including special education resources spent on METCO?

Wayland is currently celebrating 40 years with the METCO program. I believe the METCO program offers many benefits not only to the Boston families but also to Wayland residents. The direct costs associated with the METCO program are funded through a state grant, including the Director, staff members, transportation, and after-school programs. The program

conducts private fundraising to support these and other activities. Furthermore, the Town will receive in FY09 \$150,000 from the grant which will cover any direct one-on-one services, including special education services.

6. Are there curriculum changes you would like to see at the elementary level?

For specific curriculum changes, I look to the administration and teachers for such guidance as this is their area of expertise. However, there are certain areas that I would like to see strengthened, such as the use of technology in the classroom. I eagerly await the results of the technology audit so we can move forward with this initiative. In addition, the Administration has identified full day kindergarten as an area that should be evaluated in the near term. This is very complex and there are many issues to consider such as funding, curriculum changes, and level of interest by families. Nevertheless, I believe that this initiative is one that should be seriously considered. Over the last few years, the curriculum leadership has worked closely with teachers to improve the teaching and learning of reading, and revamp our math curriculum.

7. Do you support the High School Building project?

With the collaborative approach taken by the Massachusetts School Building Authority, I am in full support of the High School building project. Since the moratorium has been lifted by the state, Wayland has been chosen as one of 49 projects to move forward with the next phase of receiving state funding. The state will work with the town to identify the need and to find a solution to meet that need. Specifically, the state will tell us the projected enrollment, the square footage per student and the total cost of the project for which reimbursement will be given. The state will also commit to a reimbursement rate before we ask the residents for their approval. Early indications are that this reimbursement rate will be 40%. Last, the state will reimburse the town on a pay as you go basis so Wayland will not need to borrow the entire amount of the project. I believe that by working collaboratively with the state and the community, we will be able to find a solution that will meet the needs of the school and receive broad town support.

8. Describe circumstances in which you would not support a budgetary override to fund the schools.

Wayland, like so many other communities, is facing very challenging times with less state aid and double digit increases in healthcare and pension expenses. In FY09, the increase allowed under Prop 2 ½ barely covers these increases in healthcare and pension expenses alone, giving no room for growth in programs without making reductions elsewhere. I believe that the school department has managed its budget efficiently and has explored every possible option to increase revenue, including lobbying at the state level for a reasonable and dependable funding stream, and decrease expenses where available. Therefore, I support the current override and will continue to do so under these circumstances.

9. Would you change the district's current busing policy and if so how?

The transportation of our students to school is a complicated issue. Our policy states that students who live beyond 1 1/2 miles from their elementary school or two miles from middle school or high school shall be eligible for bus transportation. Students who live within the 1 1/2 and 2 mile limits may ride the bus with permission from school officials. Permission to ride the bus will be based on bus capacity, route times and safety considerations. I believe we need to look for efficiencies with our current busing practice but also try to accommodate our families where possible.

10. Do you think it's critical to maintain the current quality of our schools?

I believe all children should have access to a high quality public education. The quality of our schools is one of the primary reasons young families move to Wayland and, as reported in the Wall Street Journal, helps to retain house values. That being said, I recognize that this is a public school system and I am a strong advocate for maintaining the quality of our schools in a fiscally responsible way. We are fortunate to live in a community that values education.

11. If you can, then please name anyone of prominence in Wayland, either inside or outside of town or school government, that you admire, and state why?

Even though her life was cut tragically short, Jean Seiden had an incredible impact on this community and is someone who I greatly admire. Jean always put others before herself as she courageously fought cancer, as she co-founded the Wayland Angels, as she rallied her supporters through Team Jean and as she cared for and loved her family. I believe her impact is still felt in Wayland as her efforts continue to help others and as those who knew her, including myself, try to carry on her spirit and values.

12. What creative solutions have been explored to maintain the schools without increasing taxpayer funding every year? What would you add to those?

As part of the Finance Committee's Long Range Plan, the school department is working with the town to look for efficiencies in areas of like functions such as business, facilities and information technology. We have also worked closely with other town boards with regard to salary negotiations. Finally, the consolidation of the elementary schools in light of declining enrollment is a way to reduce our largest expense while maintaining the programs and services, average class sizes across the district and retaining our quality teachers. This change is currently being undertaken a year in advance given the fiscal constraints facing the town.

Having worked in both the public and private sectors, I have learned that a school's budget is very different than any private sector experience. 80% of a school budget's expenses are people related and, given federal and state educational mandates, a school cannot simply discontinue a product or service. Therefore, we look for ways to increase revenue such as lobbying at the state level for additional aid, imposing fees on families to the point where we are at the high end of our peer communities, pursuing grants at the federal, state and local levels and entering into private/public partnerships. We also look for ways to reduce our expenses, such as most recently, the school reconfiguration. Finally, the school district belongs to a consortium to provide professional development, support for students with special needs and also to purchase supplies, materials, heating oil and natural gas and is able to take advantage of some of the purchasing for the Town, as well.

13. Are there any other issues that you would like to address?

From my experience on the School Committee these last three years, I have learned that the issues faced by this committee are very complicated and that there are no easy, quick fixes. I have tried to make our work as open and transparent as possible, to ask questions, to make decisions based on facts, data and appropriate analysis and to improve communication of our thinking and decisions to the community. I would hope that those who have followed our meetings over the last several years would see that this committee works in a very open, diligent and thorough manner to provide a high quality educational program in a fiscally responsible manner to all our students.

As a parent with four children in three different Wayland public schools, I understand the issues throughout the district and I have the necessary experience to work with our administrators in providing a high quality educational program that Wayland has come to be known for. I would welcome another term on the School Committee.

