

Robert S. McCarthy, Jr. – Candidate for Ward 2 School Committee

Re: Answers to the Malden Democratic City Committee Questionnaire

1. In your opinion what do you believe is the greatest challenge facing the Malden Public Schools?

Malden Public Schools are at a crossroads relative to enrollment issues. Malden Public Schools are overcrowded and are close to capacity. Based on the fact that there are numerous major residential development projects being constructed in Malden, it is my fervent belief that protection of adequate class size is the major issue facing the Malden Public School.

It is incumbent upon the educational leaders to revisit and develop class size guidelines that protect the integrity of all classrooms throughout the entire Malden Public School system. It is paramount that we protect the appropriateness of adequate class size at the K-3 level and throughout the entire school system.

Students in the Kindergarten to Grade 3 Level are obtaining fundamental skills in Reading, Writing and Mathematics which will serve as the foundation of all future learning throughout their tenure within the Malden Public Schools. It is important to note that students at the K-3 level are learning to read which will serve a foundation for the Grade 4 through Grade 12 level where students are reading to learn.

Appropriate class size guidelines and protections need to be put in place to ensure an optimum learning environment for all students throughout the entire school system. It is my belief that once these class size guidelines are developed and modified, the school committee through its budget process needs to allocate the necessary financial resources that allow for adherence to these class size guidelines.

2. What do you believe is necessary in order to provide our students with 21st century skills?

As an educator myself, I believe that our educational leaders must develop system-wide curriculum regulations that are satisfactory for all learners throughout the entire school system. A one size fits all curriculum is not in the best interests of our students. In order to provide the students with 21st century skills our educators need to implement a pedagogical approach that infuses differentiation instruction. Their pedagogy needs to include curriculum content that infuses critical thinking skills, negotiation skills as a part of a group, presentation skills using digital modalities, and research-based activities using computer based instruction with computer apps such as Wiki's, Google Scholar, Refseek, LexisWeb, BASE, Yahoo, Ebsco, and Qesta. The implementation of these 21st century digital modalities will allow for the students to engage in research based activities followed by a writing prompt with a discussion session and a digital presentation. With the implementation of these 21st century skills within our Malden classrooms our students will be ensured of obtaining the necessary 21st century workplace competencies needed to be college and career ready. We owe this pedagogical Curriculum approach to our students. Also, I will fight to ensure that the curriculum addresses the needs of all learners with the implementation of Advanced Placement courses and applied Career and Technical Programs to ensure that all students are college and career ready with the requisite 21st century skills.

3. If you were put in a position where you needed to cut \$200,000 from the school budget, how would you approach it and what would you propose to cut?

My approach to cut \$200,000.00 from the school budget would be to ensure that we as educational leaders protect the classroom at all costs. We must ensure that our budgetary process includes enough teachers to cover all our Malden classrooms with excellent teacher student ratios consistent with the class size guidelines. I would use the budget reduction approach that cuts non- salary accounts first normally known as ordinary maintenance accounts. Many times an implementation or a budget freeze that funds emergency orders only can be incorporated as well. If such a freeze is implemented strategically the \$200,000.00 reduction can be obtained without any negative effect to our classroom instruction. Protection of our teachers/students and classroom optimization is paramount.

4. If you were put in a position where the district had a \$200,000 surplus, what would you advocate be added to the system?

Many times additional budget allocations come in the form of an earmarked program consistent with grant funding source. In the event of a general budget surplus in the amount of \$200,000.00, I would look to use the money to directly lower class size. Many times a specific classroom can start out with an optimum number and with new students entering the school system on a daily basis these numbers can change very rapidly. We must always be cognizant of keeping our teacher/student ratios at optimum levels. Once that the classroom sizes are adequate I would use any surplus funds to implement new educational programs or implement new software or hardware updates within our classrooms. Another place where the surplus can be used would be to implement new curriculum programs such as a new reading series or math series in our classrooms. Trust me being an educator myself; any surplus funds should be spent directly on raising student achievement for our students. Students first always.

5. Do you support the expansion of Charter Schools? How would you interact with the unions operating in the Malden Public Schools?

I oppose the expansion of charter schools as any expansion of charter school enrollments would have a detrimental effect on Malden Public Schools funding. First, it is my belief that the Chapter 70 funding formula relative to charter school allocations is flawed. The legislature needs to address this flawed Chapter 70 funding formula and they must implement the recommendations of the Chapter 70 Reform Commission recommendations. I am running for the Malden School Committee to lift up the public schools not tear them down. Any drain on existing financial resources through charter expansion would in fact hurt our public schools funding allocation. As an educator I bring a special budget educational skill set to the school committee position and I can hit the ground running in this financial area.

6. What do you believe is one of the biggest challenges facing our Special Education Department and how would you attempt to address it?

The biggest challenge facing our special education department is getting our out of district placement issues under control. First, it is important to note that through the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process many students need specifically tailored educational modalities in order to reach maximum feasible development within the classroom. The Circuit Breaker Law has helped with the drain on available financial resources with legally specified financial reimbursements to our district. I believe the Malden Public Schools can turn this financial situation around by implementing innovative special education academic programs whereby we bring in students from other school districts that will pay the Malden Public Schools tuition instead of us paying another district tuition. For example, we send many students to outside Language Based Learning Program and bring in tuition from other school districts. This entrepreneurial approach can save our district a tremendous amount of money. We must also look at the inclusion model for our special education students whereby our students are placed within the mainstream classroom with appropriate inclusionary models and safeguards in place so that the students can obtain maximum feasible development.

7. How will you work with the City Council to improve education funding and education access for Malden students?

It is extremely important that the School Committee work collaboratively with the City Council and the Mayor when it comes to funding issues for our schools. The notion that we are all in this together for the betterment of our schools needs to be at the forefront of our deliberations. The strength of public school system has a direct impact on our property values. It is important that this collaborate effort between the City Council and the School Committee and the Legislature be solid as we are all in this for the best interests of our children's education. This overarching theme of collaboration and the question of What is the best interests of children needs to present in all our fiscal discussions. Our children deserve nothing less.

When it comes to the issue of access for Malden students we need to ensure that all our policies are non-discriminatory. We are a public school and we need to allow open access to all children with no bias or discrimination.