

Questions for Portland City School Committee Candidates

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If elected, what will your top three priorities be?

Provision of a public education that enables all residents to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate fully in Portland's civic, intellectual, cultural and economic life in order to enrich and strengthen our community and our common future.

Transparent and accountable programmatic and fiscal management

Collaboration between School Committee and City Council

Do you have children and where did/do they attend school? [This question has no bearing on your endorsement—we merely want to have some idea of your background.]

I have three adult children. My son Sam is 23 years old and finishing his bachelor's degree in Multidisciplinary Studies (Information Technology, Philosophy and Literature) at Rochester Institute of Technology. My son Tim is 21 years old and a senior at the University of Southern Maine majoring in International Relations. Both of my sons attended Peaks Island School, King Middle School and Portland High School and were active in soccer, basketball and lacrosse. Tim was an AFS exchange student in Debrecen, Hungary for most of his senior year at PHS and has just returned from a year of studying in St. Petersburg, Russia. Sam spent his junior year in college studying in Copenhagen, Denmark. My stepdaughter Ashleigh attended Falmouth and Wiscasset schools and graduated from the University of Maine with a degree in Engineering in 1998.

Please share one positive change you have seen in our schools *and* in the School Committee over the last year?

Portland's schools and School Committee have been working very hard to review and improve basic organizational and management systems and to develop multi-year strategic, budget and facilities plans that provide an intended road map for the future. With these plans in place, the School Committee and schools have been in a far better position to proactively respond to changes and opportunities such as state funding curtailments or applying for state building subsidies.

Please share one frustrating change you have seen in our schools *and* in the School Committee over the last year?

The pace of change within Portland Public Schools this past year has been very rapid and at times may have outstripped the ability of school staff, the School Committee and the community to discern the theories of change and action being used, understand the needs/reasons for change and therefore be fully committed to the proposed changes. It will be very important in the future to clearly articulate the theories of change and action being used and transparently evaluate what is working and what still needs improvement to insure that changes made are delivering the desired and expected outcomes.

What competing responsibilities do you have, both professionally and personally, and how will you juggle those responsibilities?

Several of my professional and personal responsibilities (Director of TRiO Upward Bound and Student Support Services at USM, president of the Maine Educational Opportunity Association, member of the Steering Committee of Maine College Access Network, Executive Board member of the New England Educational Opportunity Association, CASA guardian ad litem) will help to inform and enrich my work on the school committee. Having been a single parent for over 10 years while working full time and having served on the Portland City Charter Commission this past year, I have experience managing multiple interests and priorities and feel confident that I can successfully serve on the School Committee as well as continue to fulfill my professional and personal responsibilities.

What is your position on the elected mayor proposal? How do you see this changing (if at all) the relationship between the school committee and the city council?

Having served this past year on the Portland City Charter Commission, I enthusiastically support the elected mayor proposal. An elected mayor has the potential to articulate the importance of education for all Portland's residents and its critical role in creating and sustaining a vibrant and livable city for the future.

What do you think the role of School Committee should be in determining the school budget? What ways will you improve the process of school budgeting?

School Committee should set the policy direction and desired outcomes for the superintendent and staff to use to build the budget and define the open and transparent process that will be used. The superintendent and staff have a responsibility to educate the School Committee on the financial realities of the district budget, to present alternatives when possible, explain the rationale and implications for choices made, and have complete documentation of costs proposed.

I would bring significant expertise in budgeting and the fiscal management of programs to attain desired outcomes and I am unwaveringly committed to accuracy and accountability. I also have been a successful program and budget innovator, able to see different ways to deliver needed services that are more effective in terms of cost and outcomes.

With the current reality of the state and city's school budgets, more cuts seem likely. What will you cut and why? What will you fight for to keep it from being cut?

Having many years of experience building education budgets in both allocated and competitive grant environments where funding is frequently flat or declines over the life of the grant, I approach building budgets from an analytical and strategic standpoint. What are the activities and services funded? What is required and cannot be eliminated? What expenses are fixed? What are the desired outcomes and the relationship between the services and activities and the achievement of those outcomes? What innovations might lower costs and improve outcomes for students?

A well articulated statement of the district's Mission, Vision and Beliefs should act as a guide building budgets in times of limited resources. Consistent and transparent evaluation of programs and staff in light of student achievement of articulated goals and outcomes will help to determine which services leverage the most progress towards the desired goals and which should be eliminated or revised.

I also view education through the lens of the whole child or person and believe that schools must offer an education that promotes the development of people who are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. Educational success is multi-faceted and not just a matter of test scores.

How do we increase the number of graduates that go on to pursue post-secondary education? What benchmarks would inform Portland schools towards reaching these goals?

A number of factors contribute to students accessing, persisting and graduating from post-secondary education.

First, students must stay in high school and earn their diploma. Portland Public Schools has recently put increased effort into reducing the number of students that drop-out of school and encouraging students to return to school.

Second, students have to have a solid academic knowledge of English, writing, mathematics and science as well as well-developed learning skills and dispositions and an enthusiasm for learning. PPS uses a variety of assessments and benchmarks for learning throughout all grade levels and when viewed longitudinally can identify if students are on track to being adequately prepared for successful post-secondary academic study.

Third, students must aspire to post-secondary education and have access to college entrance tests and financial aid. MELMAC has funded college visits for high school students, so they can actually spend time on a college campus. As a state, Maine has insured that all high students have taken the SAT at least once by adopting it as the Maine High School Assessment as required by No Child Left Behind/ESEA law. FAME's College Goal Sunday has raised level of awareness and completion of the FAFSA, helping students gain access to financial aid and is seeking to double the percentage of high school seniors completing FAFSA from 40% to 80% over the next five years through services funded by federal College Access Challenge grant monies. PPS must continue to support student participation in these initiatives.

Fourth, is enabling students to develop the life skills and broad networks of support that lead to personal resilience and the ability to persist through a post-secondary education program. PPS must continue to offer a variety co-curricular activities and service learning opportunities that are frequently where student develop these skills and networks.

Fifth, in addition to information on post-secondary acceptances, PPS must also collect data on the success of Portland students in persisting and completing their post-secondary studies.

How can we better include our city's immigrant population in school decisions? What do you think of legal resident voting?

PPS Multilingual and Multicultural Center provides a wide array of services designed to support Portland's over 1800 students and their families who come from homes where over 60 different languages are spoken. PPS has and must continue to reach out to parents and communities whose experience with education may be very different for our and each others and who now have to learn how our school system works and is governed.

I support legal resident voting and believe that particularly in democracy, sharing the governance is really at the core of what democracy is all about. I believe that the ability to vote and participate fully in the democratic governance of our community represents an opportunity to include all legal residents on an equal footing, without regard to whether they have immigrated from another country, moved here from another state or were simply fortunate enough to be born here, and will strengthen the civic fabric of our city.

Do you think student transportation needs any changes? Why or why not?

Portland Public Schools Transportation Department drives over 400,000 miles per year transporting children and adult students to their classes across Portland. Safety and efficiency are the hallmarks of this service which sees over 1.1 million boardings each year and delivers students on time for class each day. PPS Transportation Department is known regionally and nationally as an innovator in the field of student transportation and the district is well served by the dedication and professionalism of its staff. The City of Portland also participates in the Greater Portland Metro bus system which expands the transportation options available for Portland students through its

reduced fare program. I support collaboration between these two transportation providers to explore opportunities enhancing transportation for students and resident in Portland.

I am not aware of a need to make changes in student transportation at this time, but I have a record of openness and flexibility and would thoughtfully consider information that indicated a need for change that would improve services to students or maintain services at a reduced cost.

Data shows enrollment is declining in some Portland schools. Why do you think this is? What, if anything, should be done about it?

A number of factors may contribute to a declining enrollment in Portland Schools, population trends, housing costs, employment availability, and personal perceptions of schools.

Maine's population overall has grown more slowly than the rest of the nation over that past decade and Portland's population has actually shrunk by 2%. Maine's median age is now 44 years with Portland's a slightly younger at 39 years. An aging population produces fewer children, but may require or desire greater access to adult education services.

Portland's housing stock is comparatively expensive to purchase or rent and this may be a barrier to living in Portland for some families. Other families may not be able to find employment within the city and may choose to live closer to where they work. Other families may simply prefer living outside of the city in a more suburban environment, just as other families prefer living in an urban environment and so choose to live in Portland.

Personal knowledge and perceptions of Portland schools as well as schools in surrounding towns may also play a role in where families choose to live. This can predispose a family to either stay or move and I have had young families in my neighborhood make different decisions based on what they felt was right for their children.

Portland School Committee and Portland City Council should work together to explore the various factors that may contribute to a declining enrollment and discuss what changes in housing and employment policy might be warranted. Portland Public Schools and the Portland's newspapers have done an excellent job over the past year in broadly sharing what is happening in Portland's schools with Portland's residents, contributing to a more accurate perception of our schools, and this should continue.