

## **School Committee Candidates**

Two to be elected of four candidates

### **Allison Kangas de Bellalta**

#### **What Winchester issues do you think are most important?**

I believe Winchester needs to focus on getting MSBA approval for rebuilding Muraco Elementary School, expand multi-racial civics education across all grades, assess the district's early literacy curriculum for DESE compliance and budget responsibly for Winchester's future growth.

#### **What does Winchester do well?**

Winchester has an amazing school system. We hire talented and dedicated teachers. We have an engaged community of educated people as evidenced by our community building events and abundant social organizations.

#### **How has the Winchester Public Schools met the challenges of COVID 19 this year to support students, families, and staff which can be continued into the fall?**

The remote option for students started off very rocky. But the district rose to the challenge, listened to the parents' concerns and amended the schedule to address those issues. I think the School Committee and Judy Evans have been easily accessible to the community at large and have done their best to validate the community's concerns, even if they weren't able to fully take action to address them.

The schools also worked really hard this year to maintain a sense of community within each individual school and across the district at large by implementing all school meetings and engaging WFEE to offer WFEE academy classes.

The School Committee and Dr. Hackett can maintain open lines of communication so all of our district's stakeholders feel that their concerns are heard and addressed. There isn't a way to make everyone happy with every decision, but there certainly is a way to engage the community and be transparent and inclusive in our decision-making processes.

#### **What are the long-term challenges facing the Winchester Public Schools?**

Once again, I must mention the Muraco Elementary rebuild. The community will more than likely need to pass an override when we are finally chosen by the MSBA. That will require long term fiscal responsibility now to ensure the override is within a palatable amount. Additionally, we have a growing student population and will therefore need to address growing class sizes and stretched space limitations.

#### **What is your opinion on the Winchester Spring Ballot Question, on the proposed override for the Muraco Culvert and Muraco School Life Extension?**

Muraco Elementary School will be the final school to be assessed by the MSBA for renovation or rebuilding. We need to do everything we can to make that school not just functional but a safe, inviting and enjoyable space for the students and faculty to spend time in every week. When I was working at Winchester High School before the renovations began, there were problems of mold, leaks and dirty drinking water. It was an unsafe and unhealthy environment

for everyone in the building. We cannot let that happen at Muraco. We must do better than that by passing the Ballot Question 1.

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## **Shamus Brady**

Thank you for taking the time to learn about our candidates for school committee. My name is Shamus Brady and I humbly ask for your vote on Tuesday March 30<sup>th</sup> for one of the open seats on the Winchester School Committee. I am hoping to bring my 17 years of experience working as a teacher and a school leader to our school committee.

After graduating from Arlington High School and Williams College I was selected to join the Teach for America program and began my career as a special education teacher at a large public high school in Washington, DC. While teaching at Dunbar High School I earned my masters degree in teaching special education from Trinity University in DC. I moved on to study at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City to earn my masters in school leadership. I have worked as an assistant principal, principal and special education administrator at the elementary, middle and high school levels. My experience includes working in schools in Washington, DC, Virginia, and for the last 11 years in Massachusetts. Currently I am working as an assistant principal and special education coordinator in Melrose at the Winthrop Elementary School.

My wife Anthea and I moved to Winchester in 2014 and are the proud parents of Calder our 4-year-old and Larkin our 5-month-old. Since moving to Winchester, I have volunteered with Winchester A Better Chance (Winchester ABC) as both a tutor and a fundraiser. I currently serve on the board of ABC as the co-chair of admissions. This summer I was asked to join the Winchester Finance committee to share my expertise in school budgets and I have been proud to serve our town in that capacity.

I am running because I firmly believe we need current public-school educators on the school committee. Our school committee does not have someone who currently works in a public school and I think that perspective is essential and extremely helpful.

### **What Winchester issues do you think are most important?**

I think long term planning for our schools is essential. We need to work to ensure we have administrators, including a superintendent, who can serve long term in the district and enact change. At the same time, we need to have a clear plan and explicit timeline for replacing Lynch and Muraco. Once these projects are complete, we need to outline how all the schools would be replaced again over the next 50-75 years. The wait and see approach has left us with two schools in serious need of replacement and that lack of vision has not served our town well.

### **What does Winchester do well?**

Winchester is a great community that often comes together in moments of need and helps. We have amazing volunteers who do countless hours of work to make our town the wonderful place that it is.

### **How has the Winchester Public Schools met the challenges of COVID 19 this year to support students, families, and staff which can be continued into the fall?**

I know that many families have been disappointed with this year. Next year we need to ensure that we have the staffing to support all of our students and families. I am hoping to create a mentor program to support middle and high school students. I think the flexibility that we have

all adopted as educators will be very important to retain into the Fall. It has been wonderful to see the creativity of students and teachers when it comes to learning this year and I hope we retain that creative spirit as we move forward.

**What are the long-term challenges facing the Winchester Public Schools?**

We need to hire a long-term superintendent. We need to do a better job retaining principals. We need to replace two buildings and be prepared for increases in our student population. Most importantly we need to think long term and not in 2-3 years increments. Exploring the expansion of public preschool is also something the town needs to pursue.

**What is your opinion on the Winchester Spring Ballot Question, on the proposed override for the Muraco Culvert and Muraco School Life Extension?**

This work needs to be finished. This concludes a series of projects that will help our entire town around issues related to flooding. Additionally, it is clear to anyone who has been inside Muraco that it needs immediate work to remain a decent learning environment for students. However, this investment must not slow the process to build a new Muraco. We can and should do both.

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**Tom Hopcroft**

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**Community Activities**

Town Level:

- Served as a Town Meeting Member
- Served as Vice President of the Friends of Winter Pond, a neighborhood group focused on education, conservation and recreation in the Winter Pond watershed
- Organized parents in town from when my kids were in daycare [www.tomhopcroft.com](http://www.tomhopcroft.com) to as recently as last fall
- Helped lead the annual 5<sup>th</sup> Grade bake sale fundraiser in February 2020

State Level:

- Served on the Executive Committee and Chaired the Fiscal Affairs and Administrative Policy Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
- Serve as Chair of a STEM-focused Education Foundation focused on middle and high school girls, including teams right here in Winchester
- Leader of a board bootcamp for women, tech leaders of color, and LGBTQ tech leaders
- Serve on the board of a STEM-focused robotics innovation center.

What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

Equity is my North Star and through line for all the issues that motivate me to serve on the School Committee. We need to be more data-driven to provide a more equitable education for all students, including those with issues stemming from language-based learning disabilities, social-emotional well-being, and issues relating to academic learning loss. We need to balance teacher autonomy with equity and consistency across the district.

We need to build an inclusive and innovative culture. We need to ensure that all our students have the technology and training they need to thrive. And, we need to ensure that our district has the resources and opportunities to provide an equitable education and collaborative relationship with our peer districts. Much like an athletic team, we are stronger when we embrace and develop the unique strengths and contributions of all our students.

In the pandemic learning setting, I see physically returning our students – particularly our youngest learners -- to a more regular, in-person learning environment, with a remote option, and addressing the academic and social-emotional needs of our children as the most immediate, pressing issue.

At the same time, we must be planning for the post-pandemic learning environment now. We cannot wait to improve our screening. We need to become more innovative and develop a data-driven approach to decision-making to ensure that students receive the support they need and no child is slipping through the cracks.

Finally, we need to invest in modernizing and expanding our physical infrastructure to address aging buildings with inadequate systems as we face a growing student population.

What does Winchester do well?

The Winchester community provides an ideal environment to raise a family. Families and educators who value education choose to come and stay in Winchester, contributing a wonderful diversity of intellect and experience to our community. There is a strong culture of athletics, the arts and STEM programs as well as support for other extracurricular activities. As I have spent more time connecting with the community these past few months, I have been impressed by the students in our town that I've had the pleasure of meeting and with their commitment to their schools and classmates. I see a lot of generosity in our community in terms of both time and treasure dedicated to our students' success. Above all, I feel a strong sense that, while people may disagree on one issue or another, our community is united in our support for the success and well-being of our students.

I see a lot of energy and engagement in the parent community, and having had direct experience with children at Lynch Elementary and McCall Middle Schools, I can see how much effort is being made by teachers, administrators, parents and students to build a more inclusive and supportive community. Our investment in social-emotional wellbeing is evident.

How has the Winchester Public Schools met the challenges of COVID 19 this year to support students, families, and staff which can be continued into the fall?

There has been a lot of focus on what has gone wrong this past year and families are experiencing the impacts differently when it comes to physical health, social-emotional well-being, and financial security. Like many parents, our experience has been rocky at best this past year, but for all that didn't go well, a lot has gone right.

If you strip away all the trauma, this past year has provided the greatest technology adoption event of all time. With change comes opportunity and many of our teachers have risen to the challenge and become entrepreneurs solving problems, innovating and finding new ways to engage students in learning that will hopefully outlast the pandemic.

While the hybrid model is perhaps the worst of both worlds (particularly for younger children who thrive with consistency), it enabled Winchester to provide options for families to have some in-person or all remote options for education this year, which is more than many other districts were able to accomplish.

What are the long-term challenges facing the Winchester Public Schools?

Winchester's reputation for educational excellence helps us attract and retain teachers, administrators and families who value education. This positive brand or reputation for good education is a driver of student enrollment growth that bucks the statewide demographic trend

of fewer students matriculating through K-12 over the coming decade. This enrollment growth puts a strain on our older, aging infrastructure.

While our reputation for educational excellence draws people to town, our lack of diversity is a barrier for some families who do not see themselves in our town. Diversity, equity and inclusion will continue to be challenges for our schools due to the homogeneity of our town and the high cost of housing which skews home ownership towards less diverse income brackets, thereby limiting the diversity of our student population. We will need to be intentional as a community to build support and signal that families from diverse backgrounds are welcome in our town.

With limited commercial real estate, we are unable to drive the same level of tax revenue of several of our peer towns, resulting in lower per pupil funding in Winchester. Our educational outcomes are a testament to our teachers and administrators who are “punching well above their pay grades” to ensure all our children are receiving the support they need to succeed, and a tribute to the active involvement of our parent community and supplemental support they can provide.

What is your opinion on the Winchester Spring Ballot Question, on the proposed override for the Muraco Culvert and Muraco School Life Extension?

The override is essential in order to finish the final phase of the flood mitigation work and remove the Muraco Elementary School from the flood zone, which will be needed to enable financing for the new building. The override is also needed to support critical repairs and system upgrades to keep the building in service until a new Muraco can be built.

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## **Joanna Boylan**

Winchester Public Schools was the draw for my husband and I when we moved five years ago so that our two children could become part of the Winchester Public School system and community. My parents and I moved to the United States when I was 5 year old and as an immigrant and refugee, the value of education and equal opportunity was not lost on me. My parents instilled in me that with hard work and determination, success would follow.

As a Boston, and then Quincy, public school graduate, I believe in the Massachusetts public school system and everything it has to offer. While equitable education has always been a challenge, the pandemic has done nothing further the divide.

Earlier this fall, I spearheaded an audit of Winchester Public School’s remote and hybrid learning models when I discovered the District was not meeting state mandated learning time requirements. I organized a Winchester Insufficient Learning Hours Petition with the support of almost 500 residents that ultimately resulted in the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education auditing Winchester’s learning models. Leadership, hard work, and ability to have honest conversations with residents, school administrators, teachers, and state officials, will be the first step in ensuring the full return of Winchester students back to schools while building a diverse school system where all children can thrive.

Once elected to the School Committee, I will work to impart my vision for Winchester Public Schools. I foresee a school system that provides ample support for students struggling to learn,

growth opportunities for students needing more challenge, and collaboration with the parents and residents of Winchester on whose behalf I will serve.

I received my JD and MBA through Suffolk University and currently stay at home with my two young children, a first grader at Ambrose, and a preschooler at Winchester Cooperative Nursery School. Most recently, I served as Legal Advisor to the Board of WCNS.

### What Winchester issues do you think are most important?

At the moment, our return to school plan is certainly at the forefront of everyone's mind. In July, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education asked all school districts to submit 3 plans for consideration; (1) full remote; (2) hybrid; (3) full in-person. All districts were required to plan ahead for a situation where the pandemic might require a full remote option whilst also looking towards a more optimistic future that would warrant a full in-person option. Our school district did not follow the rules and failed to submit an in-person option. This is unfortunate because it is apparent that our district has not yet developed a plan for full return and is only just starting to put one together in March - just several weeks ahead of the state's April 5th mandate for PreK-5 to be back to school full in-person.

It is also of great concern that Winchester is not meeting the federally identified Essential Components of Reading Instruction and that many of the reading programs used do not meet the federal standards or state guidelines for evidence-based early literacy. It is completely unacceptable and disconcerting that our school district has not prioritized the improvement of our literacy programs and has refused to collaborate with stakeholders offering guidance and a willingness to work with the Winchester Public School administration to resolve the issue.

Concurrently, we need to explore what options we have to better aid students in their struggle with behavioral health issues and recovery from anxiety and trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Evans reported in October 2020 that Winchester could be required to support up to 14 out-of-district placements in the coming year which is more than \$1M more than what was budgeted in tuition and transportation costs for these students. Winchester Public Schools needs to prioritize providing training and resources for teachers and clinical staff supporting these students so that these students can continue to learn in-district. There are several excellent mental health programs that specifically support schools and students through various interventions such as: 1) connecting families directly with mental health clinicians; 2) professional development trainings and certifications to help teach mental health interventions to support the mental health needs of students; 3) case-by-case consultations with staff to provide management and planning for students whose mental health problems are negatively impacting their ability to engage in school, and 4) parent workshops to help families and communities alike to be better equipped with the tools necessary for a healthy student body. The William James Interface Referral Services, the McLean School Consultation Services Program, and MGH Think:Kids are just a few local programs Winchester could partner with to support the mental health of its student body.

### What does Winchester do well?

Winchester's greatest asset is the support of the community that can only exist in a small town like ours. This power lies in the relationships we build, through access and inclusion, and the

willingness to embrace all challenges head on. Recognizing the importance of education, our schools are generously supported financially by a community that understands that the excellent public school system is a strong draw to those families looking to move to our wonderful town. Winchester Public schools are our bedrock. It's where ideas are shared, struggles are supported, and lifelong friendships are made. But all great foundations require adaptability. Recognizing the evolving needs of the community is imperative to the continued success of our town and its residents. Here, we have clearly succeeded, exemplified by the several generations of families choosing to return home and raise their families.

How has the Winchester Public Schools met the challenges of COVID 19 this year to support students, families, and staff which can be continued into the fall?

Our public schools are held together by our resilient and determined teachers. Teachers were faced with the incredibly difficult task of overhauling an in-person curriculum to retrofit various mediums of instruction. Our teachers have guided our children through a new and very challenging year, and for that, we are forever grateful. This coming fall, we need to provide teachers with greater support so that they may better serve the needs of their students.

Winchester Public Schools provided a robust Remote Learning Academy to the students and families of our community who needed it during the pandemic. Further, WPS was able to pivot quickly and adapt the Remote Learning Academy model, when it determined that remote students' needs were not being met. The same dynamic adaptability can be carried into this Spring and Fall as we bring back the majority of our students to full in-person education. Listening to our students, families and staff and meeting their needs is what Winchester can and should do well.

What are the long-term challenges facing the Winchester Public Schools?

The increasingly prevalent tragedies of the last several years have made it clear that as a society we need to collectively work on actively combating prejudice. The key to diversity has not changed and it starts with early exposure to a variety of races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and socio-economic statuses, just to name a few.

We can start to foster a culture of awareness through multicultural events, like Lynch's International Festival, expanding upon it, and bringing it district wide. Broadening a child's awareness of the various customs and traditions within their own community is such a small thing that means a great deal.

Looking past the elementary level, I believe there should be a high school community service graduation requirement. I personally have been working with MindsMatter-Boston since my twenties. It's a non-profit organization geared towards preparing driven low-income students with the skills and knowledge necessary for the application process and continued success in college. Being so close to Boston, there are a multitude of charities seeking student involvement and granting the opportunity to connect with peers and learn from one another. The District could partner with any one of them and provide students with greater options to fulfill a new community service requirement. It would offer students real life opportunities to experience the diverse world around them, not just culturally but socio-economically as well.

What is your opinion on the Winchester Spring Ballot Question, on the proposed override for the Muraco Culvert and Muraco School Life Extension?

I'm a strong believer that the voice of the collective should be heard thus I think it's important for the voters to decide how taxpayer dollars are allocated. That being said, we need to repair school buildings and reconcile the inequities within school infrastructure. It is understandable that members of the community are concerned with increasing taxes, yet the safety and welfare of elementary school students should be paramount. The Muraco Culvert is the final and necessary step in a flood mitigation project going back 20 years and the longer we wait, the further the Muraco Elementary School rebuild timeline will be prolonged. Additionally, the culvert replacement will take over 50 homes out of the flood zone, relieving affected homeowners of the added insurance burdens whilst also increasing property values.

Furthermore, with Muraco School rebuild set to start no earlier than 2028, we cannot continue to defer the investment needed to carry an aging school into this next decade. The more we prolong the inevitable repairs, the more expensive they will become. These repairs should have happened years ago and I hope our community can once again come together to support its local schools just as it has always done.