
THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

Submitted by Ann Guay, Caucus Nominee and candidate for School Committee



Ann Guay

Ann invites voters to contact her via email

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TWO BEDFORD CITIZEN QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE CANDIDATES

Q1: Give an example of a situation in which you played a role in helping people of different opinions or perspective develop a mutually agreeable solution to a problem. This could be an example from work, volunteer commitments or a previous experience in a public role. How was this accomplished? What did you learn?

I believe my involvement with the Massachusetts Autism Commission best illustrates how I was able to play a key role in helping individuals with opposing views reach consensus.

In 2010, Governor Patrick created the Massachusetts Autism Commission. The Commission was directed to examine services available for individuals with autism, determine shortcomings and make recommendations for improvement. The Commission began meeting in October of 2010. David Harmon and I were appointed Co-Chairs of the Adult Services Subcommittee. Both of us are parents of young adults with autism.

The Adult Services Subcommittee had parents and siblings of adults with autism, including those with High Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome as well as self-advocates. We discussed what was working and what problems existed.

As the Subcommittee began to develop recommendations, it quickly became apparent that the family members of adults with autism and the self-advocates shared very different views about autism. Many of the self-advocates did not view autism as a disability while some parents considered their child's autism a tragedy. Moreover, due to how adult services are funded,

there was disagreement as to who should be eligible to receive government support. The discussions were quite heated and little progress was being made.

In my role as co-chair, I reached out to experts in the field for advice as to how to eliminate the stalemate. In the end, I recommended that we bring in a facilitator to assist the group. His involvement helped end the standoff and allowed the group to work together cohesively to develop its recommendations. The Adult Services Subcommittee Report was submitted on July 16, 2012. Some of these recommendations were adopted by the Autism Commission and included in the Massachusetts Autism Commission Report issued in March 2013.

Q2: What are your suggestions to reduce the School Department FY '15 budget so that it is consistent with Finance Committee guidelines?

As I prepare a response to this question, budget discussions are on-going. Members of the public are understandably quite interested in the process and may want to learn more about a candidate for school committee's views on the budget. Despite this interest, in my opinion, it would be improper for me to do so.

A school committee's authority stems from its actions as a group. School committee members have no authority to act individually outside school committee as a whole. Moreover, the Code of Ethics for School Committee Members cautions school committee members from making statements regarding how they will vote on matters that will come before it. For these reasons, I will refrain from answering the question about the School Department FY'15 budget at this time.

Thank you.

ANN'S CAUCUS STATEMENT

Ilsa, thank you for those very kind words. I really appreciate your support

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Ann Guay and I am here this evening to officially announce my candidacy for Bedford School Committee. As some of you may recall, I was appointed to School Committee in March of last year to complete the term of Noreen O'Gara. I have learned so much during these last ten months and have really enjoyed being a member of such an effective group. I'd like to take the next few minutes to tell you a bit about myself and my interest in continuing to serve in this position.

My husband Marty grew up in Bedford and we moved here in the fall of 1995. We have three children. Mary Catherine, Bedford High Class of 2010, is a student at McGill University. Brian is

enrolled in the LABBB Collaborative Program and George is a junior at Bedford High School. All of our children have received great educations as a result of living in Bedford. It's also worth noting that my husband Marty graduated from Bedford High School in 1982.

We have excellent schools in Bedford and are able to attract high caliber administrators and teachers who want to work and teach in a community like ours. The Bedford Schools are unique in that each morning students arrive from Boston and Hanscom Air Force Base to receive their education in Bedford. As a result, we have a student body that brings many different life experiences through the school doors each day. All of our students benefit from this rich environment.

Until I was appointed to School Committee this past March, I stood on the sidelines and watched the Bedford School Committee, the Superintendent, the Finance Committee and Selectmen, somehow manage to maintain excellent schools while unanticipated demands increased, the economy stalled and funding declined. Bedford is a case study in town government at its best.

Like most parents, Marty and I wanted good schools for our children. When considering where to live, the quality of schools is on the top of most lists. Our story is a bit different. When our son Brian was diagnosed with autism, we were already living in town and found ourselves suddenly navigating the special education system. Brian's education was a true collaboration between our family and the schools. It was Bedford's commitment to educating all of its children that made it possible. We were so proud when Brian finally entered Bedford High School in January 2011 at the age of 17. On the day of his first visit, I parked my car outside the library and cried.

In addition to bringing the perspective of a parent, I believe my experience as an attorney and policy analyst makes me an effective school committee member. Over the years I have advocated at the local, state and national level to improve services for children with autism. Through my work at Mass Advocates for Children, I played an important role in the development of the Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver which requires the federal government to reimburse the state for services to low income children. Sometimes, advocates and school systems share similar interests. As chair of Government Affairs for AFAM, I assisted in the efforts to help pass legislation requiring insurance companies to pay for services for children with autism. For those of you familiar with Circuit Breaker legislation, I have given testimony on Beacon Hill in support of this important funding stream for school districts and worked in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of Superintendents and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to ensure continued support.

As you listen to remarks you may wonder if I am only interested in special education. It is simply not the case. Just ask any teacher ever assigned to Mary Catherine or George. Over the years I have been very active at Davis, Lane, JGMS and now Bedford High School. As I watched my children go through school, I realized there was more parents could do to support the schools. For this reason, I joined the Bedford Education Foundation in 2008 and have helped in fundraising efforts to support its efforts to enhance creativity and innovation in the schools. Until I was appointed to the school Committee, I served on the Principal's Advisory Group at Bedford High School which afforded me the chance to exchange ideas with faculty and students about issues at Bedford High School. It was so interesting to hear the students' perspective.

In addition to being active in the schools, over the years I have volunteered in a number of capacities in town, including Bedford Womenade and the Bedford Housing Task Force. I really enjoy living in this town and am a strong supporter of public education. However, I am not an educator. I do think, that my experience as an attorney and a parent make me the right choice for School Committee. Both of these roles have helped me to become an effective communicator who is able to make good decisions based on the information available. I continue to learn about the schools and the challenges educator face and look forward to learning more as we go through the budget process.

Yet I stand here tonight and realize that there are great challenges facing our schools. Schools are no longer just responsible for providing an education to students. Today, people look to the schools to solve many of society's problems without an adequate funding stream to do so. I hope you give me the chance to continue on School Committee and promise to work very hard on behalf of all the students in Bedford.