



2021  
TOWN  
ELECTION

## REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BRIAN C. O'DONNELL



CONTACT

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## INITIAL STATEMENT

I am Brian O'Donnell and I am seeking a first term as one of Bedford's two representatives to the Shawsheen Regional School Committee. In that capacity, I would like to represent our community in the governance of a school that has established itself as one of the Commonwealth's pre-eminent secondary vocational programs. Bedford is fortunate to be a member of the Shawsheen district although historically we have underutilized this resource in comparison to our fellow district members (Billerica, Burlington, Tewksbury, and Wilmington). I would see part of my role as a school committee member as helping to expand awareness within Bedford of the special opportunities provided by 21st-century vocational schools for serving a range of student learning styles and interests, preparing students for college programs and other types of post-high school training, and developing skills sought by both traditional and emerging industries.

My own appreciation for the attributes of vocational schools was nurtured by my wife Renee's experiences as a teacher at Minuteman Vocational HS for nearly thirty years. It has always been exciting to see students combine academic work with hands-on experience in robotics, biotechnology, automotive diagnostics, culinary arts, etc. Vocational schools have been leaders in emphasizing experiential learning opportunities and Shawsheen has certainly well served the needs of many Bedford families. My sense is that there are probably even more students within our town who could benefit by its offerings (we generally do not use all of our allocated slots while other towns have waiting lists of students seeking to attend). For the last several years we have sponsored Brown Book Awards at Shawsheen and Minuteman at annual awards nights and such gatherings have served as a reminder of the enthusiasm many students have for their decision to pursue a vocational education.

During this campaign period and beyond I would welcome an opportunity to speak with students and other members of our community who are interested in expanding Bedford's presence at Shawsheen and have experiences and information to share related to that choice that most families make when a student is in eighth grade (and life is full of

challenging choices). I will admit that I am generally void of any practical technical skills myself (which is why I have spent most of my working years as an attorney). However, I think I can be of service to the Shawsheen School Committee and have enjoyed previously being involved in serving on various town committees, including stints on the Bicycle Advisory Committee, Transportation Committee, Arbor Resources, and others.

I would appreciate the opportunity to serve on the Shawsheen School Committee (following in the footsteps of Glen McIntyre who has generously given nearly ten years of service to Shawsheen for which he is to be commended). I look forward to hearing from residents with questions, ideas, and recommendations for this role.

## QUESTIONS ~ LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

*Bedford's enrollment at Shawsheen is significantly lower than the other participating communities. What would you do to increase Bedford's enrollment?*

I would work to facilitate using all available media to make prospective students and their families more aware of the many stories of success and satisfaction realized by Bedford students who have chosen Shawsheen (and incorporating them in telling those stories). We need more dialogue about the factors which influence decisions to attend vocational school and make sure that all parties have complete information regarding the academic and extracurricular components of contemporary vocational programs, the compatibility of attending a vocational high school with any long term college goals, and the advantages of vocational schools in providing for experiential learning.

*How do you perceive your role as a representative of Bedford on this School Committee where decision making is shared with four other communities each with a significantly larger enrollment?*

My observation of the SVRVTS School Committee (where each of the five member towns has two representatives) has been that key decisions on personnel and policies are equitably shared by representatives of all the communities, regardless of the enrollment component they represent, and I would hope to continue in that tradition. One issue with a specific Bedford focus I would be exploring is how the traditional outreach and recruitment efforts by Shawsheen may need to be amended to expand attendance by students from Bedford.