



BRAD MORRISON
SCHOOL COMMITTEE, INCUMBENT

Caucus Nominee: Yes

Email: <mailto:morrison@mit.edu>

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Thank you. My name is J. Bradley Morrison at 19 Fox Run Road. People call me Brad.

It has been a true honor to serve the citizens of Bedford for the past few years, first for a short, appointed term and then an elected term on the School Committee, as a member, the Secretary, and the Vice Chairperson. I have certainly learned a lot through this service. Indeed, I have learned that there is a lot to learn.

I want to thank all four of the other members of the School Committee with whom I have served. Each of them has been a mentor to me in a somewhat different way, so I have truly benefited from their experience.

I have learned quite a bit about myself. I have recognized that I continually return to three core principles for guidance. First, do what is right for the students – and that means for each and every individual and different student. Second, while so-called book knowledge is of paramount importance, there is way more to the school's roles than just book knowledge. Coming from a college professor, that's saying a lot! And, third, it is absolutely essential to listen to all the stakeholders in the school community.

We have struggled with all kinds of unexpected murkiness through these challenging times. Another thing I have learned is that it takes some work and some patience to find some clarity. Often, this means asking some penetrating questions to seek information that can add insight and perspective. It also puts an even higher premium on listening not just to hear but to understand, and I find that holding on to my own personal point of view rather lightly helps quite a lot.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. I humbly ask for your support tonight and again on March 12 so that I can continue to help the students of Bedford be the best citizens of the world that they can be.

REPLIES TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS QUESTIONS

Q1—In other districts and parts of the country, there are controversies about “critical race theory,” the appropriateness of some books, and the extent parents should determine the content of their children’s education. Are these issues in any way relevant in Bedford?

I believe that parents should be informed and aware of what is being taught in their children’s classrooms. We do not teach CRT in the Bedford schools. We teach diversity, equity, and inclusion, in accordance with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. I trust our teachers, department heads, principals, and administrators to make prudent decisions on what topics should be taught in our classrooms and the materials used to teach. How we teach can be as important as what we teach. At an age-appropriate pace, it is important to expose our youth to issues that can be viewed from multiple perspectives and demonstrate by example that they can be curious about how others see things, engage in civil discussions about differences of opinion, and think critically for themselves.

Q2—What is your plan regarding climate education?

I have been teaching about climate change at the university level for over 20 years. I believe we should be teaching about climate change in our schools, because it will be a prominent issue for our global society throughout our children’s lifetimes. Our students need to understand the basic science of our ecosystem and why scientists are concerned about climate change. But, we need to teach this topic in a way that engenders hope for the future and catalyzes action to make things better. If we can do this well, at age-appropriate times, our current generation of students will be informed and prepared to steward our planet into the next century. As for how to do this in the schools, the topic spans several departments, most notably the science and social studies departments. We want to ensure that multiple departments are in fact coordinating with each other about a multi-disciplinary topic such as this and then expect the department heads and teachers to do the actual planning and implementation.

Q3—Do you identify lingering issues in student academic growth as a result of the impact of Covid that need to be addressed?

There is no doubt that our students were impacted by Covid in many ways. We know that many have lost time on learning and now have gaps in their education. While we do not yet know the full impact, the School Committee, in partnership with administration, is working proactively to determine the needs of our students so that we know where to provide additional support. Our teachers will be making adjustments to instructional plans for next year to address our findings. As an additional layer of support, we hope to continue the expansion of our summer programs to include any students that would benefit from additional instruction.

It is also clear that the social and emotional impacts on our students are widespread. Our four principals have all reported increased attention to social and emotional issues through faculty conversations, staff meetings, and informal, day-to-day activities. We have added counselors at our schools and relevant content into our professional development programs for our teachers. We will continue to solicit feedback from parents, students, and experts to provide the support our students need and deserve.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

It has been my honor over the past several years to serve on the Bedford School Committee. It has been a labor of love – labor because it has been quite a bit of hard work, and love because I know I am doing it for the youth of Bedford.

During my time on the School Committee, we have navigated the challenge of managing a school district during a global pandemic. I am proud of what Bedford has been able to accomplish during these times. I have witnessed first-hand the power and effectiveness of the collaboration with other School Committee members, with the Superintendent, with teachers and staff, with town leaders and other departments, with our partners from METCO and Hanscom, and with the people of Bedford. I was the School Committee member on the District Re-opening Task Force. We brought kids back into schools safely and ahead of DESE's schedule for doing so. I have worked hard to listen to, and listened carefully to understand, the many voices of parents with differing points of view that bear on decisions we needed to make. It has been an amazing learning experience that will pay dividends as Bedford looks forward.

But, we have not just responded to a pandemic. We have done what a school committee needs to do to keep the district running. We recruited a new superintendent, guided him into the role, and built the kind of effective working relationship with him that has been a hallmark of Bedford schools. During my tenure, we have approved three annual district budgets, each time incorporating initiatives to improve the district. Now more than ever, our students need support for social-emotional learning (SEL), so we have begun the pilot of new SEL curricula in the elementary schools. We have also expanded the committee to include a student, a representative from Hanscom, and a representative from METCO.

I believe a critical priority for us in the schools is social emotional learning. Even before the pandemic hit, it was becoming clear that challenges in social emotional learning and mental health were growing, nationwide, locally, and here in Bedford. The pandemic has made these challenges even more pressing and increased the urgency to respond. This year we funded a new initiative in the form of a pilot study for social emotional learning that will soon lead to significantly increasing our support for social emotional learning, particularly in Davis and Lane School.

I care about climate change. I have been teaching about this topic in my classes for more than 20 years now. Climate change is an issue that is of significant importance for the generation of students now coming through our schools, because their generation has so much at stake.

I also care deeply about diversity, equity, and inclusion. For me, this means caring about every individual student, making sure that the opportunities that we offer are available, accessible, and feasible for anyone who want to take advantage of them. It means we need to work intentionally to create and maintain a culture of inclusion, a climate of openness, and an environment of respect for everyone – especially those with whom we disagree.

I pledge to keep listening to make sure I understand the issues that matter most to the people of Bedford. I have the experience, the passion, and the energy to continue serving you on the Bedford School Committee. I ask for your vote on March 12, and I promise to continue to do what's right for the children and families of Bedford.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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