

## LWV Candidate Information

### Question for School Committee Candidates:

*“The disruptions in school attendance and teaching methods arising from the COVID pandemic have placed additional stresses on the mental health of students and families. What actions on the part of the LPS would you promote to provide mental health support where it is needed?”*

**Name:** Larry Freeman

**Precinct:** 1

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**Preferred Phone Number:** 404-783-7563

### Community Activities

School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), Co-Chair  
Harrington Elementary School Site Council, Co-Chair  
Clarke Middle School Site Council  
Harrington Elementary PTO  
Clarke Middle School PTO, Board Member  
LPS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Input Team  
Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee  
Middle School Mock Town Meeting Program  
Community Coalition Academic Subcommittee  
School Principal Interview Panel Member

### Response:

As a School Committee Member, I will advocate for transparency and open dialogue regarding student needs and proposed solutions during School Committee Meetings. The importance of keeping our students in the classroom cannot be overstated. Embracing effective and meaningful safety protocols is essential for students, teachers, and families. Re-establishing in-school structure is an important step to meeting the mental health and stress concerns caused by the pandemic insecurities. Another priority is making mental health and stress management accessible and relevant to all students. I believe in meeting students where they are and bridging any gaps caused by school closure and remote/hybrid learning.

I support adding mental health professionals and support staff dedicated to supporting the mental health needs of our student body. We should adjust our approaches as the mental health needs of our students change. As a school committee member, I will support any proposals that are appropriate in meeting mental health needs, that include benchmarks, and that are agile to ensure objectives are achieved.

Married to an essential worker who engages directly with and is exposed to COVID positive people daily, as well as living in a multi-generational household, I know first-hand the impacts of COVID on the entire family. I support LPS partnering at an unprecedented level with Town municipal departments to ensure as LPS supports the mental health of the student population, the entire family is supported as well. Mental health and stress management require a comprehensive approach that includes students and families.

**Name:** Salvador A. Jaramillo

**Precinct:** 5

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**Preferred Phone Number:** (781) 266-7464

### Community Activities

- **Town Meeting Member Precinct 5**

- **Executive Action Committee – Precinct Clerk**
- **Former LHS/Clarke Class President 2020**
- **Former Captain of the LHS Track and Field Team**
- **Lexington High School Town Award Recipient**
- **Lexington Private Tutor**
- **Massachusetts General Hospital COVID-19 Researcher**
- **Student at Harvard University, Molecular and Cellular Biology**

**Response:**

As someone who graduated from Lexington High School in the middle of the pandemic, I understand the additional stresses and pressures that have been placed on students and families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond the pandemic, Lexington students for many years have faced growing academic and social pressures, and the pandemic has certainly exacerbated the mental health issues we face as a school district and a community. Remote learning had a significant impact on the mental and social health of our students, and we need to do everything we can to keep our students in the classroom, where they can learn and receive the help and support they need and deserve.

Awareness of mental health resources within our schools is crucial. Students, parents, and all LPS staff need to be aware of the mental resources that exist within the school district and how to take advantage of them. As a School Committee member, I would push for mental health support training for all LPS staff, so that no matter who a student or parent approaches for mental health issues, that staff member is able to direct them to the correct person/resource for mental health support. Currently, many teachers and staff are unaware of the mental health allies and programs within our schools, and we need to do more to change that. Teachers and staff need to have the tools necessary to identify students who may be struggling and address their needs or worries. We need to do more to develop a culture within our schools where we are always looking- after one another and caring for one another.

On the student and parent side, there is more we need to do as a school district to provide seminars and newsletters that discuss mental health and academic challenges at each school in the district. We need to normalize discussions on mental health and asking for help when help is needed. In a community with such a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, we need to do everything we can to remove the stigma associated with receiving mental health services and tailor our services to every student's need.

For many years, we have discussed ways to improve mental health in our schools, and although we have made some progress, I believe there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. I understand what it means to be a student in Lexington and I know our schools from the inside out. In order to find effective solutions, we need to tackle these issues from different angles and perspectives, and I believe I am the best candidate to make progress on this issue as someone who has lived and breathed these challenges.

**Name:** Eileen Jay

**Precinct 4**

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**Preferred Phone Number** 617-901-8502

**Community Activities**

School Committee Member, March 2016-present (six years)

School Committee Chair 2018-2020, Vice-Chair 2020-present

Co-Chair, Superintendent Search Committee hiring Dr. Julie Hackett, 2017-18

Chair, School Committee Policy Subcommittee, 2016-2021

LPS Strategic Plan Synthesis Team, 2019-2020

LPS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Community Input Team, 2021-present

Fiscal Policy Working Group (municipal/school), 2021-present  
Town Meeting Member, Precinct 4

## **Response**

We know that there have been mental health concerns that have arisen from the COVID pandemic disruptions in schooling. In the 2020-21 school year with hybrid and remote learning, many stressors and mental health issues arose for students and families. What we are seeing this school year with the full return to in-person learning are manifestations of pandemic-related disruptions in a variety of ways. For a number of students, it has been stressful to adjust to full-time classroom learning with its more structured environment, return to more typical academic expectations, and new social setting. In addition, students are dealing with the mental health effects of living through the pandemic itself that, for some, evoke feelings of fear, uncertainty and anxiety. As a result, in schools, we are noticing increases in stress, depression, feelings of isolation, acting out, and behavioral issues compared to non-pandemic times. This is occurring across the country, not just in Lexington.

Certainly, there is a lot of variation in mental health effects on individual students, with some able to adjust well and others who need more support. One thing that I think we need to do as a school system is to find ways to identify students who need help. We have counselors and social workers who can notice when individual students need help and provide support for them. It might also be helpful to have training for classroom teachers and staff to learn how to pick up on signals of anxiety, stress, academic issues, and social difficulties so that students can be directed to the support they need.

The pandemic is a new and unusual circumstance and may require some expertise in understanding the particular ways it has affected mental health and how that is manifested in children and young adults. If possible, it would be wonderful to bring in some experts to do professional learning for our educators and staff. It would also be helpful to have expert panels and forums for parents and families to learn about the mental health effects on their children and what they can do. Perhaps there can be opportunities to work with outside resources or organizations that can offer expertise or access to programming.

It is true all the time, but especially during crisis times, that students need a trusted adult in their lives both inside and outside of school. In school, forming a relationship with a trusted adult who cares and shows kindness can go a long way in making individual students feel connected. Especially in larger settings, like the high school, finding ways to form those connections would be helpful. Some formal structures, like advisories, can help but fostering informal organic relationships are often the best for students.

I believe that it would help all students if we can bring some more normalcy to schools and to social interactions with peers. As the pandemic evolves, hopefully, there will be more opportunity to renew some typical routines and increase occasions for social contact and interaction. Young children are missing more chances for playing and socializing with their friends. As safety permits, we want to be able to lift restrictions on recess and lunch as much as possible to facilitate socializing. For older students, there has been too much reliance on technology for social contact and not enough in-person interaction.

At the high school level, people are working on bringing back in-person social events, like prom and All-Night Graduation, that students look forward to. Perhaps we can continue to look for more opportunities for bringing students together as well.

We know that the mental health impacts of the pandemic may take time to play out. We must recognize this and use whatever resources we have to help our students. Their long-term well-being is of the utmost importance. Hopefully, we can also continue to provide opportunities to bring more normalcy back into school and, especially, more chances for students to socialize with each other and find happiness both inside and outside of school.