

## School Committee 2021

2 for 3 years

### League Question

What lessons have you learned from managing the Covid-19 crisis in the schools this year?  
What plans do you have for the coming year?

### Incumbents

#### Kathleen Lenihan

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Community Activities:

Chair, Lexington School Committee

Co-Chair, Yes For Lexington Debt Exclusion Campaign, 2016 and 2017

Past president of Bowman, Clarke, and LHS PTO/As

### What lessons have you learned from managing the Covid-19 crisis in the schools this year?

- Sometimes there are no perfect or even good answers. Sometimes we have to determine what is the best we can do in a given situation and move forward.
- Never underestimate the importance of being willing to make mistakes and learn from them.
- As much as we value and prioritize academic success, mental and physical health must always be our top priority.
- We are capable of more than we know. No one thought it was possible to reinvent how we educate students, virtually overnight, until we did it.
- Financial resources are vital, and give leaders the flexibility to maneuver through uncharted waters. So many districts do not have these resources, and we need to do a much better job advocating for communities not as fortunate as Lexington.
- Building strong administrative teams in good times is essential, because in bad times you will need them in ways you could never have imagined.
- You can never have too much patience, compassion, and empathy.

## **What plans do you have for the coming year?**

We are planning for a full return of in person learning for the 2021-2022 school year. Hopefully we will be able to bring back our youngest learners full time this spring. A Community Input Team will start meeting later this month to assist in the planning process. Of course, pandemics and viruses don't concern themselves with our plans, so we will still need to constantly monitor public health developments and be prepared to act accordingly.

When we are on the other side of the pandemic, we must address gaps in learning and ongoing mental health concerns. Living through a world wide public health catastrophe and all of the disruptions that come with it is traumatic. The consequences won't disappear when we have control of the COVID-19 virus. It will be tempting to breathe a sigh of relief and jump back into normal times. We will need to resist that temptation.

Of course, and thankfully, not everything is about COVID. This spring we will begin the process of redesigning our LHS graduation requirements. This is long overdue, as our current graduation requirements were set in the early 1990s. This is an opportunity to examine what we prioritize and what kind of educational experience we want for our students. Hopefully, our Statement of Interest for a new LHS will be accepted by the Massachusetts School Building Authority this May or June, and we can also begin planning for a new facility that will work with our new vision of a high school education.

We will also continue our work on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We will continue to address the disparities in discipline, which see Black students and students receiving Special Educations services disciplined at higher rates than other students. Another high priority to address is the lack of representation of these same students in our honors and Advanced Placement classes. We will also start work on the creation of a preK-12<sup>th</sup> grade DEI curriculum framework. To quote from our joint School Committee and Superintendent goals, this will ensure “all students understand their identities/personal journeys; and demonstrate what it means to be culturally proficient by the time they graduate from LHS.”

To return to the first question of what I have learned from managing the COVID-19 crisis in the schools, I've learned that when we work together, we can tackle just about anything. I look forward to continuing to serve our students, parents, educators, and community as we navigate our way through the end of the pandemic and plan for the future.

## **Deepika Sawhney**

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### **Community Activities:**

As a School Committee member

Currently:

- Finance Subcommittee member
- Inclusion Community Input Team member
- Electric Bus Evaluation Task Force
- Diamond Science Bowl coach

Prior 2 years:

- High School Late Start Task force
- Strategic plan committee
- SHAC subcommittee on substance abuse
- Diamond Science Bowl coach
- Diamond Science Olympiad coach

### **Question for School Committee candidate:**

**Context:** A once in a century pandemic which created turmoil at all levels of government. Guidance and support were slow in coming and often confusing.

### **Lessons learned:**

1. Hiring well and having competent management in place
2. Forming real partnerships with stakeholders. Not always a smooth process but good intentions were acknowledged which builds trust.

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b.Board of Health: Administration had almost daily communications and relied on their expertise.

c.PTOs and PTAs: Always helpful, always caring of their communities for example the COVID-19 pooled saliva PCR (molecular) testing started in January for our

school community. It is being done with the help of over hundred volunteers (LexGetScreened).

d. Municipal departments: On board with school initiatives and provide competent help

e. Parent community: This has been a very difficult time for them; however, they too understand the constraints and realities of Covid. We have really tried to listen and make mid-course corrections when things aren't working.

f. Surrounding school districts: The March 2020 lockdown was jointly implemented with neighboring school districts prior to DESE directive (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Superintendents from the Middlesex League all worked together to make this decision.

1. Communication, communication, communication: Through the fog of uncertainty, misdirection, and plain lack of experience with Covid, two way frequent communication with stakeholders was key to getting through each day. I am grateful for the many community members who wrote to us through emails, or spoke at our committee meetings, filled out our surveys or attended the over 25 + chats with students, staff and parents over the past year.
  
2. Doing difficult work on an ongoing basis improves outcomes during crises:
  - a. Review and assessment of our discipline disparity started the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work in 2018. Even during the pandemic the work has continued. For example: a third of our new hires are people of color.
  - b. Managing overcrowding and doing facilities master plan work started the redistricting work so that schools had space in 2019 and our newest buildings were well utilized.
  - c. Technology and 1:1 device distribution ongoing and ramped up during the pandemic. All students including PreK and Boston had computers in March immediately after the closure; and the IT department worked hard to get everybody the needed internet connections.
  - d. Deep budget reviews and improving financial processes.

### **What plans do you have for the coming year?**

#### **Personal plans:**

- Continue my Masters in Education Policy Management. I am focused on taking those courses wherein I can help my district by bringing back insights, and best practices from pedagogy research.
- Do a spring clean-up of the conservation spaces near our schools removing plastic debris with a student team.

- Exercise more!

**Ideas and actionable items as a School Committee member :**

- Support the administration and staff as they continue the work of education.
- Monitor parent and community concerns highlighted through surveys, emails and community forums.
- Work towards creating deeper family-school engagement and partnerships.
- Work towards creating greater equity in our schools and an understanding of the pain in our shared history.
- Help further Project Based Learning initiatives in our schools, as these help students learn critical skills as well as potentially give back to their community through their projects.
- Advocate impactfully as far as possible for policies at the state and national level for the health and well-being of our children.