



# Kathleen Shields

## Candidate for School Committee, Ward 7



**Campaign Website:** <http://www.kathyshields.com>

I have lived in Newton with my husband David since 2004. Our three daughters are NPS students, two at Ward Elementary, and one at Bigelow Middle. I have been a practicing lawyer for 22 years, and currently am a trial lawyer at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

## Questions and Answers

### **Question 1: Discuss an experience where you made a decision that you now regret.**

I don't have much use for regret because it is an exercise in wishful thinking. That said, I've made plenty of mistakes, but I try my best to own my mistakes promptly and forthrightly and to learn from my mistakes going forward. In the course of my career, I have stumbled in several ways that I will never repeat as a result of having made a memorable mistake, including the time that I was so worried about following a supervisor's direct instructions that I could not adapt to a fluid situation, and the time that I missed a filing deadline because I did not pay close enough attention to the unique rules of an unfamiliar court.

### **Question 2: If you're elected, what would be your first priority and how would you go about addressing it?**

At the moment, the single most pressing issue facing the schools is making sure that we settle a fair contract with our teachers that is within our budget. Salaries and benefits for our employees are over 80% of the schools' budget, so everything else we wish to do as a school system, including keeping class sizes small, maintaining breadth of classes and programs, working on innovative ways to improve student achievement, and providing the education materials and experiences our students need, depends on concluding a contract that makes improvements to salaries and benefits in meaningful ways, but is within the means we have.

**Question 3: The achievement gap remains a persistent problem in the NPS, despite best efforts. What role do you think the school committee can play in addressing this issue?**

Each year, the School Committee reviews student achievement data. It must hold the district accountable for that data and ask questions to understand the causes of the performance gap between subgroups. When approving the systemwide goals each year, the School Committee does, and should continue to, review the specific practices and desired outcome of changes in programming that are designed to reduce the achievement gap. Events like the Family Conference, which was opened to all this year, can help to increase understanding of our differences and hopefully contribute to an environment where all students feel ready to learn.

**Question 4: Discuss the resources needed by the schools each year to provide reasonable class sizes, breadth of programming at the high schools, and competitive salaries for teachers and staff. Please be specific in terms of budget numbers and other resources.**

The School Committee works within the budget allocation provided by the Mayor and the City Council and advocates with the City for additional resources for special projects. The City has been willing to provide extra money for facilities repairs and innovative programs like full-day kindergarten. Given the fiscal challenges the City is facing, it is unrealistic to expect that the schools' allocation will continue to grow at the 3.9% rate of increase between FY 19 and FY 20. Some savings are possible from declining elementary enrollment but middle and high schools will need additional resources as our large grades move to those schools.

**Question 5: In tight budget years, art, music, guidance, and libraries suffer in our schools. What realistic ideas do you have to avoid cuts in these areas?**

When budget deficits are small, the district has and should continue to eliminate those deficits by reducing and postponing expenditures on equipment and supplies. But when deficits are greater, the only way to close those gaps is by cutting personnel, which is over 80% of our budget. Cutting teachers and staff is very challenging, because no matter who is cut, those people were teaching important classes. There are no extraneous teachers or administrators in our system. The best way to avoid having to make such cuts is careful planning, and making sure that we have sufficient budget reserves to weather unexpected events and costs.

## **Back to Voters Guide**

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