



Tamika Olszewski

Candidate for School Committee, Ward 4



Campaign Website: <https://www.tamika4schools.com>

I'm the mother of 4th grade twins, a lawyer and an active parent leader as Vice-Chair of the Burr School Council, past Burr PTO Board Member and Board Member of FORJ, collaborating with NPS across all 22 schools. I'm running to support our schools, which I view as the backbone of our community.

Questions and Answers

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

Last year, I spearheaded a FORJ, Families Organizing for Racial Justice, community event with noted author, Debby Irving and blogger, Shay Stewart-Bouley, to model a cross-racial conversation. It was successful and well attended, however, I regret that the FORJ Board, wasn't able to incorporate as a nonprofit organization prior to our event. I was able to secure grant funding and a partnership with the Harmony Foundation to cover speaker fees, but the absence of an effective fundraising strategy was incredibly challenging and something we are seeking to remedy.

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

In order for NPS to institute key initiatives, such as later high school start time, which promises reduced student stress and improved academic outcomes, the School Committee must ensure that parents and guardians feel that their perspectives are not only valued, but are actively solicited. It would be my priority to ensure that the parent community across the district embraces their role as a valued partner in the functioning of our schools. Thus, I am committed to developing effective strategies to communicate with parents.

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?

Closing the achievement gap will require input from various stakeholders. We must continue the district's commitment to understanding the link between race, racial identity, family economic status, ESL, and special needs on student achievement and connectedness as well as allocating funding to support programs that seek to close the gap. This includes antibias training for teachers, supporting peer-to-peer training by students, and partnerships with parent groups like FORJ to enlist the support of families in furthering our community's understanding of race, culture and identity.

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 educators and staff of NPS are an essential component to the success of our schools. Teacher and staff salaries and benefits account for 85% of the budget. Thus, public education is intensively people oriented requiring yearly increases in funding to cover all of our employees. The School Committee must carefully manage our budget and serve as good stewards of the city's funds. We also must make sure that Newton is paying its teachers competitively compared to its surrounding communities in order to attract and retain the best quality educators.

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?

I've followed budget season very closely for the last couple years and met with parents who have shared frustrations at program cuts during tight budget seasons. I want to make sure that our students get what they need to thrive, that we can pay our personnel and be careful stewards of public funds. Where tradeoffs are necessary in order to balance budgets, it would be my priority to ensure that we look for efficiencies in non-core expenses such as overhead, IT costs and utilities to avoid reducing programs that are beneficial to our students.

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