

# THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

## JoAnn Santiago – Candidate for School Committee

*Certified Nomination Papers*



### Events:

No events scheduled

### Contact information:

## Candidate Q&A - February 18, 2016

### What major challenges do you expect to face during the next three years?

All schools face challenges related to development of students' critical thinking skills, changing regulations, standardized testing, managing student stress and working with budget guidelines.

The Bedford School Committee will also have to face three key challenges unique to our town: planned and potential changes in key personnel, school buildings which lack space to accommodate growing enrollment, and increasing diversity of the student body.

**Leadership.** In the last week, Bedford High School Principal Dr. Henry Turner accepted a position as principal of Newton North High school and Superintendent Jon Sills was identified as one of three finalists for superintendent of the Brookline Public Schools. Both men have served our students well, and I wish them good luck with their endeavors. It speaks well of our school system that its leaders are recruited by other districts.

Should Mr. Sills be selected for the position in Brookline, Bedford and its school committee must ensure the selection of a qualified candidate to replace him and ensure a smooth transition in leadership for both students and faculty. The new superintendent would need to

inspire an enthusiastic and creative response by its staff, parents and town residents to all the challenges facing Bedford Public Schools.

**School space.** Bedford's public schools have experienced a surge in enrollment, and this trend is expected to continue. To meet the incremental growth both the Davis and Lane Schools have reallocated space, moving classrooms and creating offices in storage rooms and hallways, and the Davis School has utilized modular classrooms. The schools have now exhausted options to increase educational and support space in each building without increasing class size beyond current guidelines.

Both the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) study and the Bedford Public Schools Space Needs Task Force report concurred that the increase in Bedford's enrollment is part of a long term trend which requires more space in our schools. Unless town residents vote to approve funding for the modest Lane School expansion at the Town Meeting on March 28, the Lane School is at risk of having as many as 27-28 students per class. This is significantly higher than the current, ideal size of approximately 22 students per class.

Within a few years the Davis School will need a more permanent option than its modular classrooms, which are neither cost effective to operate nor ideal classroom environments, and similar space needs will need to be addressed at JGMS in the more distant future.

Meeting this need is critical. Teachers must have adequate classroom and support space to provide the excellent education of which our town is so proud.

**Diversity.** Our schools are challenged to educate a student body with increasingly diverse needs, and must focus on providing equity in education while remaining within budgetary guidelines.

Bedford Public Schools have developed the capacity to bring students with special needs who were educated outside the district back into our schools, so they can learn alongside siblings, friends and neighbors. Consistent with statewide trends, the number of students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs has increased steadily. The number of Bedford students who are English Language Learners has increased by 700% since 2008, reflecting steady immigration to Massachusetts over the last 5-10 years.

The teachers, administrators and the school committee will need to work together to adapt programs and resources to ensure all students meet the district's learning expectations, and support positive interaction between students with different backgrounds, while remaining within the town's budget.

## How will you advocate for academic excellence within the town's financial resources?

As a school committee member, I will bring a focus on strategy and data analysis to ensure decisions are:

- based on evidence,
- consistent with the Bedford Public Schools long term goals, and
- consider regulations, mandates, financial resources and other factors which impact Bedford Public Schools directly and indirectly.

The impact this approach has on advocacy for academic excellence is illustrated by my work with the Bedford Public Schools Space Needs Task Force.

In 2015 the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) determined the growing enrollment in Bedford's schools is a long term trend, rather than a temporary increase. The Bedford Public Schools convened a Space Needs Task Force, a talented group of volunteers including school personnel, parents, grandparents and other interested residents, to review this study and determine if the findings were valid. I served actively on this task force, with much of my work revolving around a close analysis of the NESDEC study, demographic and school enrollment trends, historic and future growth of Bedford's housing supply, projected turnover of homes from older residents to younger families with school-aged children, employment projections for the Route 128 corridor from Waltham to Woburn, Bedford's school rankings and home values relative to other towns with comparable school systems, and other factors before concluding that the NESDEC conclusion was the correct one.

Members of the Space Needs Task Force projected the additional number of classrooms needed to remain within the guidelines for academic excellence, reviewed several options for expanding capacity of the schools and funding the project. The Task Force examined several creative solutions before determining the most cost-effective first step is a modest expansion of Lane School, and it explored options for both timing of construction and funding source. Although Massachusetts offers some funding for school construction projects, this was determined to not be the optimal option to our space needs issue. Only a small percentage of projects submitted receive state funding, recently funded projects are focused on schools with urgent issues and/or safety concerns, and Bedford's application for a construction project at Davis School was recently denied. Instead, the schools are seeking funding for this expansion at the Town Meeting on March 28. (This analysis of funding options is on page 32 of the Space Needs Task Force Report, which is posted on the Bedford Public Schools website.)

Through our work analyzing data, considering a wide range of environmental factors, and looking creatively at solutions, the Space Needs Task Force was able to substantiate the need, determine the scope of the project, and identify the most cost-effective option for the town.

## **2016 Campaign Statement**

I am pleased to run for the opening seat on the Bedford School Committee, and respectfully request your vote. As a member of the School Committee I will bring the perspective of a parent of middle and high school students, twenty years' experience as a strategic planner helping not-for-profit organizations make data-driven decisions, and a desire to help our town foster its excellent public school system.

My husband Omar and I have lived in Bedford for ten years. We are very grateful for the environment in which it has allowed us to raise our two daughters, who are growing into thoughtful and independent young women. Many aspects of the town from the attentive planning, the robust recreation programming, and the engaging summer programs contribute to this, but the schools are at the heart of it.

During the last several months I have worked on the Bedford Public Schools Space Needs Task Force, digging deep into population projections and other state and local data to determine that the recent increase in enrollment at the Davis and Lane Schools is a long term trend requiring the town to explore options to expand school capacity. I look forward to continuing my work with this task force as it begins to explore options to respond while being mindful of taxpayer funds.

My husband and I have also volunteered in support of our children's activities, including in the art room and World Language Program at Davis School, coaching Destination Imagination teams, providing backstage support for the cast and crew of the John Glen Middle School spring musicals, and cheering on the BHS girls' volleyball team.

As a professional, I bring the ability to thoughtfully analyze data to solve problems. My experience includes applying for and working with state and federal programs and developing financial budgets for new business ventures. For many years I also have worked with the community boards of not for profit organizations (which perform in a capacity similar in many ways to that of a school committee), helping them to consider how they will respond to longer term trends influencing the operations of their organization. My educational background includes an MBA for Boston University and a BA in Economics from Simmons College.

In summary, I bring experience and skills which will be valuable to the Bedford School Committee as it works to ensure our schools have the strong leadership and resources

necessary to educate our students. I look forward to the opportunity to serve the residents of Bedford and keeping our public school system strong.