



2021  
TOWN  
ELECTION

## REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BRIAN C. O'DONNELL



CONTACT LINKS

[Brian O'Donnell's Email](#)

## FINAL CANDIDATE STATEMENT ~ MARCH 8, 2021

I have appreciated the opportunity in recent weeks to discuss my interest in serving on the Regional School Committee and to use campaign forums to highlight some of the reasons Shawsheen Valley Technical High School is a great resource for our community.

Sharing the news about what Shawsheen has to offer is a particularly important role for the school committee representatives from Bedford. We need to disseminate facts such as that Shawsheen's standardized test scores are among the best of its peers, 60-70% of its graduates not only leave high school with specific vocational skills but also go on immediately to two or four-year college programs, its students participate in and excel at Skills USA competitions throughout the state and nationally, its co-op programs allow students to earn income while developing job skills, that it sends students to compete in Microsoft Office competitions as far away as Orlando, FL; it offers foreign language and travel abroad opportunities, dual enrollment programs allow for the earning of college credits, its students have available to them 20 varsity athletic programs using top-notch facilities (with no user fees!), or that competitive E-Sports and Robotics teams are among the many extracurricular and community service programs available to students.

So if you have not paid the Shawsheen part of our public school family a visit in a while, I encourage you to do so, in person once Covid-19 protocols allow and/or through the extensive online materials available on Shawsheen's website. For example, one current video includes interesting comments from a Bedford High School alumnus who is now head of the Mathematics Department and a coach at Shawsheen, reflecting on his own decision process when he was an 8th grader at JGMS and the factors, myths, and uncertainties that students and families need to address when making the decision about taking the journey over to Shawsheen. It is well worth a look.

Shawsheen and its School Committee are currently facing many of the same challenges confronting nearly all school districts in terms of dealing with limited growth in resources while addressing the need to upgrade facilities and equipment to prepare students for the

modern workplace. A recently approved administrative reorganization which effectively freed up resources to better staff specific academic programs is a good example of what the school is doing to re-enforce its student-centered approach to budgeting. My observations of vocational programs have convinced me that while they may not be the best choice for every student, they are a great choice for many, and matching the right kids with the right school opportunity is something we all support.

I look forward to an opportunity to serve as one of Bedford's representatives assisting with the governance of Shawsheen. In that capacity, I also hope to hear from community members of all ages with ideas and as to how we can expand Shawsheen's role as part of Bedford's public school system. Go Rams!

## VIDEO PSA ~ THANKS TO BEDFORD TV

[Click this link to watch Brian O'Donnell's video PSA on Bedford TV](#)

## INITIAL STATEMENT

I am Brian O'Donnell and I am seeking a first term as one of Bedford's two representatives to the Shawsheen Regional School Committee. In that capacity, I would like to represent our community in the governance of a school that has established itself as one of the Commonwealth's pre-eminent secondary vocational programs. Bedford is fortunate to be a member of the Shawsheen district although historically we have underutilized this resource in comparison to our fellow district members (Billerica, Burlington, Tewksbury, and Wilmington). I would see part of my role as a school committee member as helping to expand awareness within Bedford of the special opportunities provided by 21st-century vocational schools for serving a range of student learning styles and interests, preparing students for college programs and other types of post-high school training, and developing skills sought by both traditional and emerging industries.

My own appreciation for the attributes of vocational schools was nurtured by my wife Renee's experiences as a teacher at Minuteman Vocational HS for nearly thirty years. It has always been exciting to see students combine academic work with hands-on experience in robotics, biotechnology, automotive diagnostics, culinary arts, etc. Vocational schools have been leaders in emphasizing experiential learning opportunities and Shawsheen has certainly well served the needs of many Bedford families. My sense is that there are probably even more students within our town who could benefit by its offerings (we generally do not use all of our allocated slots while other towns have waiting lists of students seeking to attend). For the last several years we have sponsored Brown Book Awards at Shawsheen and Minuteman at annual awards nights and such gatherings have served as a reminder of the enthusiasm many students have for their decision to pursue a vocational education.

During this campaign period and beyond I would welcome an opportunity to speak with students and other members of our community who are interested in expanding Bedford's presence at Shawsheen and have experiences and information to share related to that choice that most families make when a student is in eighth grade (and life is full of challenging choices). I will admit that I am generally void of any practical technical skills myself (which is why I have spent most of my working years as an attorney). However, I think I can be of service to the Shawsheen School Committee and have enjoyed previously being involved in serving on various town committees, including stints on the Bicycle Advisory Committee, Transportation Committee, Arbor Resources, and others.

I would appreciate the opportunity to serve on the Shawsheen School Committee (following in the footsteps of Glen McIntyre who has generously given nearly ten years of service to Shawsheen for which he is to be commended). I look forward to hearing from residents with questions, ideas, and recommendations for this role.

## QUESTIONS ~ LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

*Bedford's enrollment at Shawsheen is significantly lower than the other participating communities. What would you do to increase Bedford's enrollment?*

I would work to facilitate using all available media to make prospective students and their families more aware of the many stories of success and satisfaction realized by Bedford students who have chosen Shawsheen (and incorporating them in telling those stories). We need more dialogue about the factors which influence decisions to attend vocational school and make sure that all parties have complete information regarding the academic and extracurricular components of contemporary vocational programs, the compatibility of attending a vocational high school with any long term college goals, and the advantages of vocational schools in providing for experiential learning.

*How do you perceive your role as a representative of Bedford on this School Committee where decision making is shared with four other communities each with a significantly larger enrollment?*

My observation of the SVRVTS School Committee (where each of the five member towns has two representatives) has been that key decisions on personnel and policies are equitably shared by representatives of all the communities, regardless of the enrollment component they represent, and I would hope to continue in that tradition. One issue with a specific Bedford focus I would be exploring is how the traditional outreach and recruitment efforts by Shawsheen may need to be amended to expand attendance by students from Bedford.