

# BLACK LIVES MATTER

## Black Lives Matter Cambridge School Committee Endorsement Questionnaire

CANDIDATE NAME: Patricia (Patty) Nolan

COMMITTEE NAME: Committee to Elect Patty Nolan

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EDUCATION: *local public school, Kindergarten (in Park Ridge, Illinois)*

*Sacred Heart School (Catholic) grades 1-4 (in Winnetka, Illinois)*

*Stamford, Connecticut Public Schools, grades 5-12*

*(Belltown Elementary School, Dolan Junior High School, Stamford High School)*

*Lycée Mater Dei – one year Exchange student in Belgium, after high school before college*

*Harvard-Radcliffe College, 4 years, finished with bachelor's degree in Government, with a thesis on feminist consciousness*

*Yale School of Management – master's degree*

### PAST AND PRESENT COMMUNITY SERVICE OFFICES HELD:

- *Cambridge School Volunteers: Treasurer and Board member*
- *Amigos School Council co-chair, more station*
- *Peabody Parent Connection*
- *Cambridge United for Education*
- *Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association*
- *Longy School Visitors Board,*
- *Green Decade Cambridge,*
- *Workmen's Circle (progressive Jewish Sunday school),*
- *Green Streets Initiative,*
- *Children's Village Preschool – board member and President,*
- *Yale SOM Alumni Assn.,*
- *Artworks Ed Fund,*
- *Radcliffe Mentor Program,*
- *HEET – Home Energy Efficiency Teams - Team leader, including work on several houses of worship and schools to reduce their energy costs to save money for operations.*

### CURRENT EMPLOYMENT:

*Working for all residents of Cambridge, on School Committee. I quit my work – which had been in economic development and job creation in urban areas including many welfare-to-work*

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*cooperatives – to be able to devote time to the School Committee job. We are lucky enough to get paid, unlike most School Committee/Board members.*

## SPECIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE:

*The job of School Committee is basically being the Board of Directors for the school district. My background and training is extremely valuable for that role. I believe a good board has a range of skills – and some key skills that any board needs include mine: wide-ranging management experience, deep training in strategic thinking, independent verification of information, and thoughtful analysis.*

*I also bring a consistent uncompromising courage to speak up on issues and take a stand. For example: When faced with the decision of whether to renew the superintendent's contract, I was the only one who voted No. It was personally sad. I had supported him earlier. Yet when I did a comprehensive review of his record I couldn't vote for a seventh year. WHY? The district met almost none of our mutually established goals, the achievement gap was unchanged after 6 years, the restructuring of our district, which flew in the face of much educational research about effective schools was not implemented well, and the state DESE documented that key elements of the supt. job were not done: notably evaluations of all top administrators. I could not in good conscience vote for another year especially since that seventh year came with a hefty raise – on top of a salary that is very high. In all honesty, I don't like being the one who stands out – except I know that I want my elected officials to show courage on issues of importance. That is why I believe I have qualifications – I have proven that I will take a stand even when politically risky. And I will be honest about my votes - You deserve to know how we vote, why we vote that way. When I explain my superintendent vote, the reaction is usually “why were you the only one.”*

*While not lucky enough to be born in Cambridge, I was lucky enough to be the first in family to go to Harvard. Education was the ticket into the middle class for our family -my mother had to fight to go to college and my father went to commuter college at night while he helped support his family, since his father was disabled. So I understand the importance of education, even though I was lucky enough to have middle class parents.*

*I have worked in the public sector, nonprofit and for profit. I worked in a corporate setting including the international consulting firm McKinsey, and at smaller companies, including leading an environmental firm and a telephone reseller, and helping start worker-owned co-op companies including some with a goal of helping folks on public assistance become company owners and support themselves.*

*Thus, my background and experience qualify me for office and re-election.*

## WHY ARE YOU RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

*Because I make a difference. And I want to continue. I love the job – and believe that my work has had a positive impact. I am willing to dig in, sort through data and speak up when needed. I work hard, reach out to people across all sorts of divides, and have had substantive positive*

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*impact in a number of areas. Most importantly, I have a vision for Cambridge and want to keep working to make it real.*

*We need someone like me who is results oriented: every meeting and every discussion I focus on results: what were we expecting, what are we seeing, why are we successful and why aren't we successful.*

*I am also running since it is important that we are respectful of educators: more and more we have seen that state and national mandates are driving education to use tests to determine achievement. While I embrace accountability, I support the "more learning less testing" movement. I hear the voices of our educators pleading for more attention to children's needs so they can learn.*

*I want to continue working on policy improvements. I have been collaborating with my colleagues to ensure our discipline policy focuses on helping students, not punishing them. I spearheaded several substantive changes such as allowing student clubs more access to affordable travel opportunities. I advocated successfully for a number of policy changes, including supporting student chefs in culinary and working to include student voice in our policy discussions.*

*And I am running since I want us to be more focused on supporting excellence & equity. An example of how I made a difference is that I kept insisting that more students, of all backgrounds, should be taking Algebra I in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It is shameful that here in Cambridge, the birthplace of The Algebra Project, that we had only 10% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders passing Algebra I. Through my efforts with my colleague Richard Harding and more recently Kathleen Kelly, the district has moved to raising its own goals for 8<sup>th</sup> graders successfully completing Algebra I. WE have constantly reminded all that we must insist on higher standards in math education, including increasing our district goals and expectations for all students. And the high school now – because of my motion asking for reports and requiring in-depth honest analysis – is looking at diversity issues in AP, with data and best practice information in hand. The School Committee led the way to more diverse students enrolled in more upper level classes.*

## WHAT ISSUES WILL YOU BE FOCUSING ON?

*Closing the Achievement gaps. Since my first term, when I worked with the Cambridge NAACP to document that the Achievement gap was not closing – to this term, when I continued to document the lack of progress over time – I have been relentless in asking why. I know we made progress and I know there are wonderful things going on – like we have one of the nation's highest graduation rates for black and Latino low income males. But how can we continue to gloss over an achievement gap that has been unchanged in 10 years? Yet we don't really talk about it – we highlight areas of strength, which is appropriate. But we should not hide areas of weakness. Or we won't improve on them. That is a key role I have played and will continue to play if re-elected: laser focus on using data honestly to assess progress.*

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*Early education is key – I will continue to advocate for a comprehensive early education plan for the entire city. This plan should be a city/school department joint plan – and include neighborhood organizations, child care centers, universities, employers. Universal preschool should not be only within the school department – it should be available to all families through some organization.*

*Relationship building is key. More and more educational research demonstrates that students need to have a good relationship with someone at school in order to learn. And teachers benefit from forming strong relationships with students. We need to identify our district strengths and weaknesses in the arena of family engagement and also social –emotional learning. Then we need to have a comprehensive plan to ensure that families are welcomed and involved. And a clear plan to ensure that the social – emotional needs of students can be met within the school walls. Then learning can happen.*

*I want one of our focus areas to be including creativity and play in the classrooms. Kids learn through play – and we have gotten away from that part of education.*

*Student centered learning is something that many education reformers are discussing as key to addressing achievement gaps. The students group that worked on this question last summer presented a very powerful presentation with specific recommendations on how teachers can and should reach out to students, raise their expectations of students, and provide support to students. When we listen to students and support their excitement around learning, everyone will benefit.*

*Student and community empathy and understanding are also a priority area: I have thought it would be great to have very explicit programs to have students from different backgrounds be assigned to get to know each other. And to include families in the process. If Cambridge is to be a community, we should know each other better. I live in West Cambridge – and was lucky enough to go to college and graduate school. Our family knows many families with different backgrounds – could our school district foster more relationships, so we can all have more relationships with people different from us? That seems to be the best way to address race and class divides: open up a dialogue – acknowledge the sensitive nature of discussions – and have the discussions. We must not shy away from being uncomfortable. After all, the divides are uncomfortable and unconscionable. My vision is to work together openly and honestly so we can walk the talk. WE talk the talk of valuing diversity – but we don't walk the walk – partly since we maintain our own silos.*

**DO YOU BELIEVE THAT BLACK LIVES MATTER IN CAMBRIDGE AND BEYOND? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

*ABSOLUTELY! It's a cliché, but anyone who has followed the news this year knows that Black Lives SHOULD Matter and too often don't. Far beyond Michael Brown – it's Tamir Rice and Chris Lollie, it's John Crawford & Yvette Rice. It's Sandra Bland - it's the astonishing statistics that prove continued and ongoing racism in our country. It's every child in Cambridge whose skin happens to be darker than my kids', whose parents have to give them a talk I never did. To be careful, to be aware that others judge them differently. That they may get in trouble for*

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fill in verb- Walking, Driving, Staring, etc. While Black. Cambridge does better than some, yet we are as enmeshed in racism as any place.

*One cannot read the statistics at practically every turn – criminal justice, education, income, jobs, neighborhood segregation, travel opportunities – and not know that Black Lives [too often do not] Matter.*

*It matters since we are not truly democratic or just society unless all people are respected and have the same opportunities. How can we possibly say we are a fair society when this unfair treatment continues? How far removed are we from believing that some people are less equal or deserving than others? How is that different from other types of discrimination we abhor – and we criticize when we see it elsewhere? It is not different. A central feature of our society – like it or not – is racism.*

*Until no parent has to teach their child to act a certain way because of their skin color, then Black Lives Matter matters.*

IF ELECTED, HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MAKE SURE THAT BLACK LIVES MATTER IN CAMBRIDGE?

- Are you committed to increase percentage of teachers of color to at least 30% and to have half of them be Black teachers? Why or why not?

*I voted for the change to our stated target policy, to 30%. I still support it, and want us to make a commitment to do some different things to reach the goal. We increased the goal several years ago. We have yet to meet it. We need to be honest that what we've been doing is very good, but needs to be even better. As a district with one of the highest percentage of teachers of color in the state, we have some laudable results. But it is not good enough.*

*We also have to pay attention to retention. Once we hire teachers – and other staff – paraprofessionals, principals, special educators – we need to support them and provide them with whatever help they need to be effective members of the staff.*

- Are you committed to ending the criminalization of black students in Cambridge Public Schools by implementing a restorative justice practice in the schools from K-12? Why or why not?

*For years, I have pushed for a re-evaluation of our discipline policies, towards restorative justice, not punitive measures. I brought the Solutions Not Suspensions to the School Committee floor. I arranged a meeting three years ago with CRLS Principal Smith, two other School Committee members, the Schott Foundation leader of the Stop Suspensions program and me. The point was to learn about how to work together on having a policy of never suspending a student to home. If a student needed to be out of a classroom for safety reasons, then an in-school program or if necessary another program would be used – not sending a student home.*

*So, I am committed and have worked on exactly this vision for several years. And I will continue.*

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- Are you committed to implementing African-American, West Indian, Afro-Latino, and African history in the K-12 Cambridge Public School curriculum? Why or why not?

*Absolutely – since that is HISTORY. Without including African-American, West Indian, Afro-Latino and African history we would be leaving out history. We should not be teaching limited history. A good history curriculum doesn't leave out the story of all peoples. My own background includes work in the area of social history – especially women's history. I was a teaching assistant for one of the first women's studies classes at Harvard – it was a struggle to get it approved. That experience lives with me – and sadly, still, 35 years later, marginalized groups including women and people of color have to fight to have their stories heard.*

- Are you committed to creating a scholarship for Black students, especially returning students, parents, and Black people with CORIs? Why or why not?

*That is an excellent idea – and I support it. I believe working with Friends of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School - FoCRLS – that could happen. Why would I support it? Because students of all ages, including those with a criminal record, deserve our support.*

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