

CRLS Register Forum [high school student newspaper]
School Committee Candidate Survey

Name: *Patty Nolan*

Current Job: *School Committee member*

Education: *Stamford High School (very similar to CRLS); A.B. Harvard College;
M.P.P.M. Yale School of Management*

FOR INCUMBENTS: What is one vote that you cast this term in which you were in the minority? Why were you right?

I voted not to extend a new contract for the superintendent, and instead limit his term to 6 years instead of 7. The vote was 6-1. The vote was difficult for me, since I had championed Dr. Young when he first came to Cambridge. After 5 years on the job, we had to decide whether he should continue beyond 6 years. I reviewed the information and found:

- the superintendent achieved almost none of his goals (which were mutually agreed to)*
- the restructuring of the district into middle schools instead of K-8 was not implemented well and educationally we lost many of the best practices that had been in place in our schools in grades 6-8*
- the state Dept. of Education reviewed the district and found that a central, key part of the superintendent's job had not been done: 75% of top administrators in Cambridge were not evaluated in writing-- for five years*
- the achievement gap was unchanged over 5 years*

Given that record, I could not in good conscience vote for another year, and a raise that was much larger than any other staff, including teachers raise.

FOR CHALLENGERS: What is one decision from this term of the school committee that you disagreed with? Please explain your stance.

N/A

What is the biggest issue facing the high school today?

How to get more students engaged and active in learning and excited about school. *That lack of motivation and excitement leads to a host of issues, including the inequitable learning environment. For example, it leads to the distressing and embarrassing problem of CRLS having many academic classes not reflect the racial and socio-economic diversity of the school as a whole. It is not because black, brown and poor kids can't learn or can't do high level accelerated work. Somehow there is a disconnect in the system such that all students are either not encouraged to be in Honors or AP classes, or students don't feel prepared or motivated to be in them. Either way, that has to be addressed since it is something that diminishes the whole school and by*

extension the whole city.

Imagine if instead of desperately waiting for summer to start or dreading summer being over, most students were desperately hoping for a longer school year since classes were so great and learning so much fun and the relevance to their lives so clear that they wanted to be in school MORE MORE MORE. That is the biggest issue: there are not many schools (are there any???) where that is the culture. At CRLS too many students are not excited – even those who do well are not often joyful about their work. Can't they be?

Even if the issue you mentioned above can't be solved right away by a policy change, what is one specific policy that you think would ameliorate it?

Have a policy to require every student to take at least one Honors class every year. And, after evaluating the program, see if that policy could be changed to having every student take at least one Honors class every semester.

What qualities will you look for in the next superintendent of CPSD?

Integrity, management ability, proven track record of increasing student achievement, respectful of all community members – including parents, staff, teachers, School Committee members. Also critical to educational success is a leader who can digest research, review data, discern what the lesson is and deliver a plan to address issues.

Do you support the dress code in its current form? If not, how would you modify it?

I believe students and teachers should jointly discuss and determine the dress code. School Committee would then review and approve. The thing I would modify is the uneven enforcement of the dress code. My understanding is that depending on the student and the staff member the dress code is not uniformly and equitably enforced. That is not good policy.

Would you support eliminating tracking in some CRLS classes? If so, which ones and why? If not, why not?

I don't support "tracking" – since that often means a whole set of classes with no fluidity – no ability to move into different threads of classes. However, I support having honors and AP classes. I also support the initiatives to encourage more movement between the different levels. And I support us polling all students on what works and what doesn't work in the Physics class, which is currently the only class that has no levels other than the Honors option within the class.

Shame on us if the leveled classes are segregated – instead of getting rid of

those classes, we need to attack the root cause. Students are not equally encouraged, feel comfortable, welcomed or prepared. Why not? Until we answer that, we won't have addressed the underlying reasons. And if we get rid of leveled classes without addressing those issues, we will have not assured that the system is more equitable. And last time we got rid of all leveled classes, we lost a lot of students at CRLS. I want the enrollment to stay high – since it is a sign of confidence. I want a CRLS that lives its motto and walks the talk of Opportunity Diversity Respect.... And Excellence for ALL.

Will you vote to maintain the CRLS block scheduling system? If not, what would you change about it?

I believe the block scheduling system should be reviewed – since it is good practice to review initiatives after a few years to see what works and what might be improved. Block scheduling has been around for long enough that an evaluation is timely. There are benefits – e.g. having science labs, photography, art, ceramics classes which are 80 minutes allow for much more learning. There are downsides – e.g. not having math or a world language for 8 months (one semester plus the summer) can double summer learning loss. Another issue is that there is not way in the current schedule to have a mini-course or time during the school day for some tutoring or study hall or help. That type of schedule- having a little flexibility – might be very useful to students, who could tailor the time to their individual needs. Instead, almost all classes are 80 minutes every day for five days a week for five months. There are other schedules schools use for a block schedule which differ from CRLS', which is a full block. For example, a modified block, which could include the option of having shorter classes or some yearlong classes while maintaining a block schedule. That type of change might benefit students. I support a review of the block schedule which would include teacher and student input. Based on that review, we could keep or modify the current schedule.

Do you support granting votes to the two CRLS student delegates to the School Committee?

Honestly, I am mixed. I explored this idea a few years ago with another member and we found that if we gave a vote to the student delegates it would have to be a symbolic vote. We cannot legally allow the student delegates to vote on any of the official votes of the SC. Given that, I wonder if students want to have a vote, knowing it is only advisory or symbolic. I would want to discuss with the current students reps and ones who served in the past and the whole student body to see what they want.

Do you support the existence of charter high schools in Cambridge? Should

CRLS be doing more to retain students who transfer to these schools?

I support the existence – since charter schools were formed by state law as a means to spur innovation and give families an alternative. Not all charter schools spur innovation, of course, but we can learn from the two charter public high schools. Prospect Hill has a great program for juniors called Junior Journey, where many members of the class spend three weeks in Guatemala, doing community service, intensive Spanish and cultural exchange – all for very little money. I would love for CRLS to have something like that. And Community Charter School of Cambridge has internships required of all seniors – they spend part of their school day working with a local non –profit learning and working. That type of internship is something only some CRLS students, mostly those in the RSTA co-op program. Wouldn't it be great for more to be able to do an internship? Also, the charter schools can and should learn from CRLS – for example, we do a great job of tolerance and supporting LGBT students as just one example, and we have a fabulous theater and arts program.

The issue of charter school enrollment is district wide, not just high school. Most students who go to the Cambridge charter schools start in elementary or middle school. I believe if our schools provided families with more confidence that their children's educational needs would be met fewer would choose charter schools – which would be good for our district. And if we learned from each other, both regular and public charter schools would be better – and that is best for students, so I support it.

Why do you think some Cambridge parents send their children to private schools? If you had children, would you consider sending them to private schools?

Another great question! Many people say it's because those families opting for private school don't like the diversity of our schools or are elitist.... I don't believe that. Many people send their students to private schools since they are not confident that their children will get an excellent education in our schools. Many families start in our public schools and transfer – which means that we failed to give them a good enough education. And some families choose private schools for religious or family legacy reasons.

Many families opt out when they don't get a school they want in the kindergarten lottery. We can fix that problem by adjusting the school choices to be more in sync with what families want. We just need political courage to take that step – and 100% of families could get their #1 or #2 school, and fewer would opt out.

I respect those parents who make a choice for private or charter schools – I find it hard to tell them what is best for their kids. The fact that Cambridge has one of the highest rates in the state of families opting out of regular public schools does

make my competitive juices want to change that. I want more families to be confident that our schools offer their children an excellent education.

We chose to have our two children in Cambridge Public Schools K-12. Even through the heartache and trauma of the consolidation, the anxiety over the Innovation Agenda, I believe that our children – Joshua Nolan who graduated CRLS last year and Alexis Rabkin who is a senior this year – have gotten a good education.

The current motto of CRLS is “Opportunity, Diversity, Respect” . If you could add one word to this to better describe your vision of an ideal high school, what would it be?

Excellence

Which of your prospective colleagues do you think you would work best with? Why?

I would be so jazzed if Kathleen Kelley, Pia Cisternino, Emily Dexter, Manikka Bowman and Fran Cronin and I were all elected – and Cambridge had an all female School Committee. I think we would get tons done and it would be an amazing statement to the city that we trust women as leaders. So often leaders are all men and it is accepted. With all women, there'd be a statement.

Which of your prospective colleagues would you bring with you if the city were overrun by zombies? Where in Cambridge would you go?

I'd bring Richard Harding and Jake Crutchfield, since we look most like The Mod Squad.... So we could actually BE the Mod Squad Plus I am sure one of us would have “How to Survive a Zombie Invasion” which would save us so we could save the world.

Why are you the best candidate for Cambridge School Committee?

I am the most focused on using data and research and best practices to figure out what policies we should pass and how we should structure our budget. I am the most knowledgeable about various aspects of the budget, enrollment and controlled choice – all important elements of our district as we plan for the future. I am the most courageous when it comes to standing up and taking a stand. I do it when it is the best for the students. Plus, I have great energy, I work diligently, and I truly respect and honor the opinions of students, teachers, and all staff.