

Q&A with the School Committee Candidates

WaylandNews has submitted the following set of questions to each of the candidates. Candidates were given 11 days to respond, and asked to limit their responses to 100 words per question. As in past years, longer responses are permitted, but get truncated; if more than 100 words are needed, we accommodate by posting a separate document with full responses.

Candidate Shawn Kinney declined to participate, citing time constraints. Ms. Butler's responses exceeded the 100-word limit; this is the long version of the document, which contains her full responses. The truncated version is available online as well here:

<http://waylandnews.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/scqaTruncated.pdf>.

1. What do you bring to the table that makes you a better candidate than your opponent?



BUTLER: My interests, training and experience are particularly well-suited to the open position on the Wayland School Committee because of the committee's legal responsibility for setting school policies, hiring and evaluating the superintendent, overseeing contractual negotiations with teachers and staff, and developing the schools' annual budget. Each of these core responsibilities, together with matters that arise during the school year, requires careful analysis of complex, sometimes conflicting, considerations, within the boundaries of relevant law.

For more than twenty-five years, the Wayland School Committee has been fortunate to have an attorney as one of its five members. As the only candidate who is an attorney and former Superior Court judge, I am fully capable of continuing to provide the School Committee with legal expertise. This makes for better decision-making; and can also save the town unnecessary legal expenses. As a judge, and now as a mediator, I handled complex civil litigation involving employment, environmental, insurance and other business issues, as well as felonies on the criminal side. I have honed skills that are equally applicable to this kind of work: listening carefully, weighing evidence in highly complex matters, spotting and understanding legal issues, treating parties and advocates fairly, and making difficult decisions, while encouraging respectful discussion of the issues in an open and fair manner.

I have a long, public record of commitment to the Wayland schools and the children of Wayland. Since moving here in 1988, I have been active in many organizations that support education of all types: Wayland Public Library, Wayland Historical Society, WayCares, Wayland Public Schools Foundation and Wayland PTOs. I now serve on the Wayland Youth and Advisory Committee of Wayland Youth and Family Services. This work for the last five years has provided me with valuable understanding of social climate issues in the schools. Wayland Youth and Family Services provides counseling services and referrals to youth and families. Its diversion program, shared with the Wayland Police Department, is an alternative to court involvement. WY&FS is also an active leader in education programs concerning stress, substance use, bullying, and other current issues facing our town's youth. WY&FS cultivates a commitment among Wayland's young people to community service by running the high school summer community service program with Wayland Park & Recreation, and the community service awards.

I have taken the time to fully inform myself by meeting with teachers,

administrators, staff and counselors as well as by attending meetings and programs on topics ranging from the schools' budget to differentiated teaching for gifted and talented students, social adjustment for struggling students, and substance use.

I believe that Wayland is a great town, with great schools developed over the years by generations of committed citizens who worked to create an outstanding school system. I appreciate deeply the work of those who have served the town in many ways. I am committed to Wayland and its schools, and if elected, would help the school committee make decisions that maintain or enhance the high quality of education in Wayland, while being fiscally prudent.

I would be honored to serve the Town of Wayland by contributing my time, unique experience, and skills to its School Committee.

2. Do you support the Town Meeting petitioner's article calling for an independent review of the Town budget focusing on the school budget, and why/why not?



BUTLER: It's my understanding that this is a now resolution rather than an Article. I believe that School budget reviews must always be performed with an eye toward savings. Such efforts have been consistently undertaken by the School Committee as well as the Finance Committee prior to this proposal. I fully support all reasonable efforts to ensure town revenues are being spent prudently. With respect to this proposal, however, I look forward to Town Meeting where voters should expect to hear more about some important details before voting to appropriate up to \$40,000 for a one-time service. For example, it is unclear who would conduct the independent review or how a selection process would be handled. I would be interested to know if the Petitioner has identified and met with firms who are well-versed in school budget reviews and have specialized expertise in this area. I would be interested in seeing the report of a similar analysis done for a different community (deleting any identifying factors) so we can be sure this kind of expenditure is advisable.

In addition, since the proposed review concerns only the schools' budget, I would expect that the proposed Operational Review Committee would have among its members at least one person appointed by the School Committee. As written, this proposal does not provide for a member to be appointed by the School Committee.

3. Did you vote for the high school project, and why/why not?



BUTLER: I did vote for the high school project in last November's election and at the subsequent Town Meeting. The existing facilities are inadequate for the academic programs now offered at the high school; they are out of compliance with state codes and recommendations; and a carefully planned new high school was shown to be less costly in the long run, and better suited to the needs of students and teachers. This was a great opportunity to receive some \$25 million in State funds which significantly alleviates the burden on Wayland taxpayers.

I also believe that Wayland is extremely fortunate to have had, and continue to have, the services of Lea Anderson, Chair, and the other highly qualified members of the High School Building Committee to shepherd this project

through completion. The new Wayland High School will be a tremendous asset to the entire community for many years to come.

4. What are the three most important qualities you would like to see in the next Superintendent? (Feel free to add more if you like.)



BUTLER: A superintendent is the key to a well-run, outstanding school district. It is he or she who provides the daily leadership to teachers and staff, and ultimately, the students. Under state law, the superintendent is responsible for selecting the principal at each school, who in turn selects teachers and staff.

These are among the qualities I would like to see in the next Wayland superintendent:

- Intellectual curiosity, sterling character, and personal warmth, combined with an ability to inspire principals, teachers, staff and through them, students, to reach their highest and best potential;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills which will consistently inform all of the schools' constituencies, especially parents, and inspire confidence in the schools; and
- Successful experience as an educator and high level school administrator, including ability to develop a fiscally realistic proposed budget.

If I am elected, I will be eager to hear the views of all stakeholders as to the qualifications a superintendent should have, and will work with the other members of the School Committee, and any hiring subcommittee, to develop comprehensive criteria for the hiring process. As with all matters that will come before the next School Committee, if elected, I will work to foster transparency of process and consensus-building.

5. What is your opinion on how high school-related user fees should be?



BUTLER: Wayland is not alone in needing to impose user-based fees; more and more schools find this to be a necessary method to retain sports and other programs. Current fees in Wayland are substantial; for example, at the high school, students must pay \$225 per sport per season (with a family cap of \$1000) and each bus rider pays \$180 per year. The combination of fees throughout the system can become a hardship for families. The alternative, however, is to cut programs, which deprives students of important and valuable activities. If elected, I would be reluctant to increase fees beyond current levels unless absolutely necessary to retain a particular activity.

6. Do you agree with the current School Committee's educational priorities, and is there anything you would change?



BUTLER: The School Committee's educational priorities are informed by its mission statement, which seeks "to provide a rigorous and stimulating academic environment that promotes the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Yet we deem it equally important to nurture self-confident, collaborative, and conscientious individuals." Educational priorities in every Massachusetts school district, including Wayland's, are also informed by myriad state laws concerning, among other things, curriculum frameworks, standardized testing, special education, length of school day and school year.

Wayland complies with state education law while also following its own time-tested pedagogical methods in certain areas (e.g. use of teacher advisory groups, or TAGs in the middle school); it thereby offers a creative, high quality education to its students. I would not change anything in this regard without further study as a school committee member.

7. Do you agree with the current School Committee's co-curricular priorities, and is there anything you would change?



BUTLER: Wayland has enjoyed a long tradition of offering a wide variety of co-curricular programs and clubs in the arts, sports, academic and community service fields. Wayland students continue to enjoy and excel in these activities. Townspeople join with proud parents to see top-notch music and drama performances, sporting events and art presentations. Wayland students, like the adults in this town, have a wide range of interests and skills. While some might question the importance of a particular activity that draws a relatively small number of students, the school committee must consider the value of such an activity for students who may not be interested or well-suited to another, more popular activity. Success in that activity could make the difference for some students in their high school career.

It is also especially important for high school students to have opportunities to try various activities, from academic decathlon to robotics, from French club to school play, from SADD to WSPN, from community service clubs to sports, from orchestra to peer tutoring, and so many more options. By providing these opportunities to students, the community recognizes the whole child's need for stimulation, recreation and community-building beyond the academic classroom. From my professional experience presiding over criminal cases, often involving young offenders, it is clear to me that a penny spent engaging a student in school and community saves dollars in the long run. From my work with Wayland Youth and Family Services, I am acutely aware of the pressures experienced by today's students. Clubs, sports and other activities help students maintain a healthy balance in their lives and often increase the involvement of the greater community in the schools.

8. Do you believe that the pay scale for Wayland teachers and administrators is appropriate, and why/ why not?



BUTLER: I am committed to supporting qualified, dedicated teachers. I support past school committees' decisions to attract and retain the best available teachers to Wayland. That commitment has been essential to the excellence of our schools and the learning experience of our students.

Wayland has traditionally compensated its teachers well, because the community recognizes both the importance of fair compensation for outstanding teachers, and the demands that are placed on our teachers during the course of the year. We expect, and receive, from the great majority of teachers a commitment that extends far beyond the corners of the employment contract.

The past commitment to excellence among the teaching staff has resulted in retention of teachers, whose pay increases according to contract provisions. Experienced teachers, now at the top of the pay scale, have demonstrated a long-term commitment to Wayland students; they serve as mentors to younger teachers and are a valuable asset to the school community. At the same time, younger teachers, at the lower end of the pay scale, are to be encouraged as they often bring innovative ideas into the schools. In an effort to retain the best teachers, careful attention should be paid to new teachers during their first years, before they achieve professional status.

I was lucky to have two parents who were teachers. I knew first-hand the long hours and tireless commitment they made to their students.

Salary negotiations are currently underway, with the School Committee balancing, among other concerns, its academic goals, and those relating to teacher compensation issues, with the overall financial situation of the town and its taxpayers. I believe my experience as a mediator and arbitrator involved in complex business litigation would be valuable in assisting the School Committee in future contract negotiations.

9. Do you support the current class size guidelines? Do you believe that class size matters?



BUTLER: I have faith in the expertise of the administration and school committee that grappled with this issue and considered all of the available data. The current class size guidelines allow, but do not mandate, up to twenty students in grades K-1, twenty-three in grades 2-3, and twenty-five in grades 4-5, the middle school, and the high school. The guidelines appropriately and specifically contain built-in flexibility to meet the needs of a particular class by, among other techniques, reducing its size, reassigning students to other classes, opening another class section or adding a teaching assistant.

Provided that flexibility is available, the guidelines represent a worthwhile effort to set benchmarks that are carefully developed, fair to all students, and responsive to fiscal constraints.

10. Are there any changes that you believe are necessary in order for the schools to remain highly-rated?



BUTLER: I have been involved as a parent with the Wayland schools since 1995, and have always been impressed with the high quality of the system, especially in recent years with sharply reduced revenues from all non-fee based sources. To attend a Wayland High School graduation, middle school concert, high school Mock Trial event, elementary school play, any athletic match, or a teacher conference is to witness first-hand the climate of concern for the whole child within a rigorous academic program.

In my mind, the big challenge isn't so much how to change the school system, which has a stellar record on so many fronts. Rather, the challenge is ensuring its continuity as an education leader. In these economic times, it is a challenge to be able to continue providing services that have served our students so well. That said, it is also imperative that we continue to explore and carefully implement proven initiatives, such as programs for gifted and talented students, differentiated teaching where appropriate, and, full-day kindergarten, if funding is found, and it is successful on a piloted basis.

11. Is lower academic performance by the schools acceptable if necessary to reduce the tax burden?



BUTLER: Given the mission of the Wayland School Committee, and the overwhelming pride Wayland citizens have traditionally taken in their schools, lower academic performance by the schools is not an acceptable option. Town-wide efforts, including the School Committee's, to lessen the impact of increasing costs in the face of reduced state and federal aid must continue. I am confident that with efforts at all levels, Wayland will continue to find a way to maintain its educational excellence in a fiscally prudent manner.

12. List the factors that you would require in order to support a budgetary override to fund the schools.



BUTLER: While I have not had direct experience preparing the school budget, I have followed the process over the years. I have talked to members of the School Committee and the Finance Committee and have a deep appreciation for all the thought, diligence, and care that goes into the process. It requires a significant amount of work and reflects personal dedication to achieve an acceptable balance among sometimes conflicting goals. Achieving a fair resolution can be a difficult process, and occasionally (depending on one's personal vantage point) there is resulting pain whether an override is proposed or not.

The key, in times of increased costs and reduced revenues from local, state and federal sources, is to balance the interest of all taxpayers to have the lowest possible tax increase with the town's consistent and overwhelming support of its schools, public safety, library and all Town services.

I have supported certain overrides in the past because I felt they were necessary to maintain services throughout the town. If I am elected to the School Committee, given the current high tax rate, I will support efforts to rein in spending that is not required by law or contract and that is not required to achieve the academic goals of the school department. My professional background as a judge has taught me that an open process with respectful listening to all points of view, and careful analysis of the evidence is crucial to reaching a sound, fact-based decision. As a mediator, I understand the value of eliciting constituencies' interests, while facilitating a resolution that all parties can support.

13. What is your opinion about the recent proposal to assign district-owned laptops to ninth graders?



BUTLER: I attended the informative technology presentation on April 15 at the Wayland Middle School, and have closely followed the discussion about how best to continue the use of technology in our schools. Right now, students from elementary grades through 12th grade are using shared computers in many disciplines including math, science, research, art, music composition and writing.

As one elementary school teacher said that night, "Computers multiply me" in the classroom. It is clear, too, that computers, in the hands of trained teachers, can enhance the learning experience of students at all academic levels and abilities. There is no question that for most of our students, their familiarity with laptops makes it a readily accessible tool for learning.

To the extent that students are already using laptops in the classroom, I support making computers available to all students in a given class. To provide 1:1 laptops for all students would be an enormous expense. I understand that the question is currently under discussion, and I would be very interested in hearing how it would be funded.

14. Are there any other issues or proposals in the Town Meeting warrant or elsewhere that you would like to address?



BUTLER: I support the debt exclusion ballot question, which would give the town the ability to borrow money for certain capital expenditures, including technology updates, infrastructure and equipment in the schools. That question, if passed, and an ensuing vote on its portion of the capital budget, would also provide needed funds for town-wide investments, including repairs and equipment, a feasibility study for a new senior center, paving, and construction of a new building at the town beach. It is of vital importance that we maintain facilities and programs that are well-run and widely-used.

15. If you can, then please name anyone of prominence that you admire in Wayland, either inside or outside of town or school government, and state why.



BUTLER: This is a good question and it's a hard one to answer because there are many, many Wayland people whom I greatly admire. Some are prominent, some may not be as well known outside of their field. By naming a few, I do not intend to overlook others who are equally, if not more, worthy. The people I most admire were or are all Wayland residents. All share the quality of devoting themselves over long years to Wayland or the larger community: Joanne Davis, educator and historian of the Wayland Historical Society; Jack Wilson, who for 50 years served on various town boards, including the School Committee; Lea Anderson, past PTO president, former School Committee member and unparalleled chair of the High School Building Committee; Attorney Lauren Rikleen, first woman to have chaired the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, former President of the Boston Bar Association, founder and president of MetroWest Harvest, a charitable organization which transports donated food to shelters in the MetroWest area; and my husband, Attorney James Grumbach, long-time volunteer of legal expertise and mediation skills in Wayland and beyond. I would also like to mention the late Jan and Charles (Jim) Owen, ever-optimistic forces for the common good, hard-working volunteers in the schools, library and the outdoors, and the late Ken Moon, inspiring leader for conservation in Wayland.

It has been said that one of the greatest assets of a town or city is its social capital – the citizens' good will and willingness to work together to create, support and maintain well-run institutions and programs. These individuals, all working with many others, have made significant, lasting contributions to Wayland's social capital.

I am grateful to WaylandNews for this opportunity to answer questions relating to Wayland schools and the school committee. I would appreciate your vote on Tuesday, May 11. Thank you.