

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 truncated version of the document, The separate document with full responses is available online here:

<http://waylandnews.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/scqa.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

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

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

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

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

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)

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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