

BEA Responses
2025 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate's Name: Paul Robert Joy

Office Sought: Belmont Select Board

Home Address: 9 Harvard Road, Belmont MA 02478

Telephone: 617.584.2960

Email: paul.joy1@gmail.com

The Belmont Education Association (BEA) represents approximately 525+ educators, administrators, administrative assistants, and education support personnel who work in the Belmont Public Schools. In addition, there are approximately 500 Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) members who work in other districts or are retired public school employees who live in Belmont. Our goal with this questionnaire is to educate BEA and MTA members and ensure the election of candidates who share our vision for great public schools in Belmont. As we have done in previous years, the information will be shared with members by mail and on social media. Please email (belmonteducationassociation@gmail.com) this questionnaire with a high-resolution headshot before February 6th.

Thank you.

Trish Ball	Bethany Fitzsimmons	Denise LaPolla	John Sullivan
Unit C VP	Unit D VP	Unit A VP	BEA President
(617) 905-9551	(781) 316-6242	(617)851-9196	(617) 365-1073

MTA wrote to Governor Maura Healy to ask for her to utilize the significant increase in Fair Share funds to invest in public education. In addition to asking for budgetary support for the various fiscal challenges including Mental Health, Chapter 70 Inflation Glitch, and the Education funding crisis we also asked for support on three fundamental issues of economic justice for educators. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with:

1. *Allowing municipal educators to participate in Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML). Public school educators, a workforce that is primarily women, are among the only workers in the Commonwealth not included in our state PFML law. We ask that you support incorporating educators into the law and, in order to avoid an unfunded mandate, have the state pay the employer share. This is an essential benefit that should be available to all workers.*

Agree with MTA/BEA's position

Paul Joy's Response

I support incorporating public school educators into the state's Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program with the **state** covering the employer share. This guarantees fairness for the entire teacher workforce and helps address teacher shortages by increasing retention. Based on current estimates, if the state assumes the employer share, Belmont and its 525 educators would incur no direct cost. Of course, it's important to study indirect expenses — as, for example, substitute coverage, administrative needs — to have a full picture of the net impact.

That being said, as a former teacher, I've seen firsthand that investing in educator well-being pays off in reduced turnover, lower burnout, and improved overall health. In the long run, when educators no longer have to choose between family responsibilities and professional obligations, we foster a stable, motivated, and high quality workforce. The result is better outcomes for both teachers and students, and a school community where everyone can thrive.

2. *Ensuring a living wage for all educators. All educators deserve a true living wage that allows them to support themselves and their families and fair pay is critical to recruiting and retaining a high-quality and diverse workforce. Yet many educators, particularly our Education Support Professionals, earn far less than a living wage and their wages can vary dramatically from district to district. We propose increasing the statewide minimum salary for teachers, which has not been updated in decades, and creating a statewide minimum wage for Education Support Professionals. Under our proposal, the state would commit to providing reimbursements to school districts for the increases over several years.*

Agree with MTA/BEA's position

Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

Support Modified MTA/BEA position

Paul Joy's Response

Based on my own journey from inadequate to more livable wages, I completely agree that teachers and support staff deserve fair pay. However, I believe the solution should be tailored to local conditions rather than being a statewide, one-size-fits-all mandate

- Local Needs Vary

I earned \$39K when I started teaching and moved up to about \$52–\$53K; I know just how challenging low wages can be. Nevertheless, each district has unique financial and staffing situations. A statewide minimum might strain some budgets more than others.

- Flexibility is Key

Because I have actually experienced low wages as a teacher and know what it is like, I am able to advocate for local control over wages, control which allows for adjustments based on the economic conditions of each area. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't account for the diversity in district capabilities and challenges.

- Collaborative Decision-Making

My experience has taught me the value of negotiation. I support local unions and school committees working together to set wage floors which would allow them to balance wage increases with other critical needs such as reducing class sizes or improving school infrastructure.

In summary, while I agree teachers and support staff deserve fair pay—based on my own journey from inadequate to more livable wages—I believe the solution should be locally tailored rather than a statewide mandate.

While I support local control over salaries for school personnel, I oppose the BEA's proposal for uniform, state-wide minimum salaries for teachers and education support staff.

- 3. Adjusting the pension COLA base so that it is no longer paid on only the first \$13,000 of pension earnings. We thank you for recognizing the inadequacy of the current COLA system through the creation of a special commission to evaluate it. As we await that report, it is nevertheless clear that an increase in the COLA base is long overdue after more than a decade at its current level. We urge action in the FY26 budget to immediately increase the COLA base to better ensure that retired public employees can live with dignity and economic security.*

Agree with MTA/BEA's position

Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

Paul Joy Response

Thank you for raising this critical issue. The special commission reviewing the COLA system for state employees and teachers was due to file its report by February 1, 2025. I am committed to carefully examining its findings and recommendations once it is available.

I take your point that the current COLA base — limited to the first \$13,000 of pension earnings — has not kept pace with rising cost. However, it's equally important to understand that there are broader implications. For instance, any change to the COLA system could have ripple effects on other pension structures, such as the Belmont Retirement System (BRS). As you know, Belmont is currently addressing significant unfunded liabilities to the BRS, with the catch-up portion of our assessment removing an additional \$7 – 8 million annually from our operating budget. This is an amount nearly equivalent to the 2024 override passed by residents.

Given these complexities, I believe it is prudent to hold off on taking a definitive stance until we have a full understanding of the commission's report. I look forward to further discussions with the school committee and community members to ensure that any future policy respects the needs of our retirees while safeguarding the financial health of Belmont.

LOCAL ISSUES

1. Funding the Schools Belmont Students Deserve

Belmont's per pupil expenditure is lower than 18 comparable districts and the state average.

If Belmont allocated school funding at the state average there in 2022, we would have been able to spend \$6,613,192 more on Belmont Students.

Teaching and learning have become more complex and additional support is needed to ensure student learning. The results of underfunding impact our most vulnerable students and has led to an increase in out-of-district placements. The hyper-focus on "headcount" and not students is not an effective approach.

How will you advocate for adequate school funding, minimally at the state average, that meets the needs of all Belmont Students?

Paul Joy Response

Thank you for sharing this data. According to 2023 DESE figures, Belmont's total expenditure per pupil is \$19,411 for our 4,557 Pupil FTEs — below the state average of \$21,885 and far behind peer communities like Watertown (\$27,612) and Cambridge (\$38,933). While these comparisons provide important context, what truly matters is ensuring our students receive a quality education.

A strong local economy fuels strong schools. Yuan and I moved to Belmont because of its exceptional public schools, and as both a former teacher and a parent, I know firsthand how program cuts in areas like language and music — and the near-cut of Kindergarten aides in the Fall of 2023 — directly impact our children’s learning experiences.

Here’s what I will do as a Select Board member.

1. Grow the Belmont Economy

I am a passionate advocate for economic development. By expanding our commercial tax base, we can increase school funding without placing an extra burden on taxpayers. Peer communities with robust tax bases demonstrate that a thriving local economy directly supports better educational outcomes.

2. Plan for Long-Term Fiscal Stability

I will work to finalize a town-school compact and continue our revenue-first budgeting model, along with continuing the practice of holding multiple budget summits that bring together the Warrant Committee, Capital Budget Committee, School Committee, and the Select Board. Having collaboration and a compact will set clear spending targets and ensure sustainable, school and town-centered investments even as enrollment trends evolve.

3. Advocate for Student-Centered Policies

My work with initiatives such as the Portrait of a Graduate Working Group as well as my leadership as Economic Development Committee Chair resulting in bringing a paid virtual internship program for Belmont High School students, underscores my commitment to evidence-based policies that prepare our students for success in a rapidly changing, AI-driven economy.

My efforts to grow our local economy with an emphasis on prudent financial planning townwide, means that I am committed to ensuring that Belmont’s schools receive the resources they need to provide an outstanding education — benefiting our children, strengthening our community, and securing our town’s future.

2. Confronting Racism & Privilege

The union has placed a priority on confronting racism and white privilege in our schools, union, and community. Our union created Belmont Educators of Color and Accomplices, with a mission to Educate, Advocate, and Eliminate Racism. The group aims to educate themselves and others about the history of racism, advocate to create supportive relationships and dismantle racism in

our schools. We also partner with the BPS to establish school and district Equity Teams that meet once a month to discuss issues of equity, diversity and inclusion.

How have you supported diversity within BPS or elsewhere and if elected how would you work to eliminate racism in our schools?

Paul Joy Response

There are a number of different ways in which I've supported diversity across BPS and all of Belmont. First and foremost, this past fall I led an effort to increase the size of the Belmont Select Board. My core argument was that "Belmont is too large and too diverse to continue to stick with a three-person Board." I went on to say that diverse perspective and inclusive decision-making is CRITICAL to addressing the complex issues that Belmont faces. And finally, near the end of my presentation, I asked town meeting "Which board size (three or five) actually creates awareness across Belmont of our cultural difference AND allows for greater diversity? As the husband of an immigrant and the father to three amazing Asian-American children, I can't tell you how much this question matters." And while my citizens petition was tabled indefinitely, I believe the core argument remains intact and this issue will return in the future.

Another way that our family has supported diversity more directly within BPS has been through after-school language education. Over the past year, my wife Yuan has — with my complete support and encouragement — taught Mandarin Chinese to K-2 students through the Wellington PTO's After School Enrichment Program. Yuan stepped up to serve because our family strongly believes that early elementary foreign language education is one of the best ways to encourage creativity and cultural awareness. And I fervently wish that our schools had the ability resume offering young students at the elementary level more formal language education.

If I am elected to the Belmont Select Board, I will bring with me these experiences and a whole host of others to the task of eliminating racism in our schools and across our entire town. I would work closely with the Human Rights Commission, the DEI Implementation Committee, Belmont Against Racism (BAR), School Committee members and Belmont Educators of Color and Accomplices, and all community members to continue to advance the cause of racism elimination.

3. Group Insurance Commission

According to the March 2022 Structural Change Impact Group report moving to the GIC "will result in cost savings through economies of scale, while providing employees with quality benefits." Our conservative estimates from the same time indicate moving to the GIC would be a \$2.4 million savings for the town. This does not include substantial one time funds of drawing

down the health insurance trust or reduction to Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) savings from moving to GIC.

Do you support changing health insurance benefits by moving employees to the GIC?

Paul Joy Response

In considering whether to support changing health insurance benefits by moving employees to the Group Insurance Commission (GIC), I believe it's crucial to approach this decision with a nuanced perspective. Here's what the Select Board should consider.

1. We should thoroughly evaluate the financial implications, ensuring we understand not only the immediate savings of approximately \$2.4 million as previously estimated but also the long-term financial impacts. This involves a detailed comparison of current self-insurance costs against potential GIC expenses, including any hidden or transition costs.
2. A comprehensive assessment of the benefits offered by GIC is essential. We need to compare these benefits directly with what our employees currently receive, focusing on coverage quality, employee satisfaction, and any potential gaps or enhancements in health care provision. This will help determine if the move would be advantageous or detrimental to our workforce.
3. Engagement with our unions is non-negotiable. Successfully moving to the GIC will hinge on fair negotiations. This dialogue should aim for a transition that maintains or improves employee benefits while being financially prudent for the town.

In conclusion, while the potential for significant savings exists, I think our support for this change should be contingent upon a detailed analysis of these three critical areas — which I've understand is now underway. Only with this information can we make an informed decision that balances fiscal responsibility with the well-being of our employees.

4. Engaging Educators

What have you done or what will you do to engage and partner with BPS educators to address the concerns associated with public education in Belmont?

Paul Joy Response

As chair of the Economic Development Committee, I led the introduction of the Work-Based Learning Alliance (WBLA) to Belmont in 2022-23, connecting students with real-world learning opportunities. In Spring 2024, I hosted a pivotal networking event linking Belmont businesses, WBLA leadership, and BPS administration to introduce this program to local businesses. I think

this is one of the most important program successes the EDC has had since I've had the opportunity to serve on it.

Going forward, I am committed to expanding such initiatives. This includes advocating for policies that support educators and students especially in light of ongoing economic and workforce changes that young people will have to navigate into the 2030s and 40s.

YOUR PRIORITIES

5. *What are the main reasons you are running for office/re-election?*

Paul Joy Response

Let me answer your question with two questions of my own. First, what am I — Paul Joy — doing with my TIME that actually gives Belmont the opportunity to be better? And second, what can I do to help the people that are a part of our community be better — especially on issues and challenges that make people mad, frustrated, and so on? This means we can't just focus on zoning and expect that to be the final panacea and solution to Belmont's financial problems.

My multifaceted background in consulting, education, non-profit management and oversight, and strong interest in technology and renewable energy gives me a wide range of skills and knowledge to bring to the Select Board position. And that it turn makes me a strong candidate for leadership in Belmont.

As our family has long since realized, Belmont is a place of community, where residents embrace our open and accessible form of government and where volunteers play a critical role in civic life. But at the same time, we need forward-thinking leadership that doesn't rely on outdated strategies or reactive governance. Belmont cannot address systemic issues like our structural deficit, deteriorating infrastructure, or economic stagnation with piecemeal solutions or divisive politics. Instead, we need to prioritize progress and collaboration, so that that Belmont's boards, committees, and Town Meeting are able to work together effectively.

Let me summarize. Belmont is great at doing studies. We've had two financial task forces over the past ten years. We've numerous economic development, permitting, and zoning studies over the past twenty years.

We need to do a better job of actually following through on the recommendations these reports have given us. Recommendation 16 of the first financial task force was to create a "field management" group. Why did it take the town nine years to actually follow through?

Finally, it's worth MY TIME now to further engage and help Belmont and our community members be better together. I truly look forward to working with you to make this happen.

6. *Please specify the top three priorities you plan to address.*

Paul Joy Response

Top Three Priorities for Belmont Select Board

1. Drive Economic Development to Reduce Residential Tax Burden

Belmont must become a destination for private sector investment to ensure long-term fiscal health and lessen the tax burden on residents. This requires a strategic approach to zoning, permitting, and infrastructure, as well as competing for state grants and prioritizing quality-of-life improvements. By fostering a business-friendly environment, we can attract diverse commercial opportunities while maintaining Belmont's unique character. A key component of this effort is completing the Belmont Compact — an essential framework for aligning our economic goals with community values —and integrating it into the town's broader fiscal strategy.

2. Establish a Long-Term Comprehensive Plan for Sustainable Growth

With the Comprehensive Plan just getting started, now is the time to shape Belmont's future thoughtfully. This plan must prioritize a balanced approach to development, promoting a vibrant commercial sector while preserving residential neighborhoods through sensible zoning. It should also address infrastructure needs, environmental sustainability, and housing diversity to ensure Belmont remains a desirable place to live, work, and raise a family. Community input will be critical to crafting a plan that reflects Belmont's values and sets a clear path for the next decade.

3. Strengthen Education and Senior Services as Cornerstones of Community

Belmont's excellence in education and its commitment to seniors are fundamental to our town's identity. We must make sure that our schools remain top-tier by supporting educators, students, and families, as we also address the challenges of enrollment growth and facility upgrades. It is equally important to provide robust services for seniors so they can age in place with dignity and have access to the resources they need. By investing in these priorities, we can maintain Belmont as a community that thrives across generations.

Additional Information

7. *Please provide any additional relevant information about your candidacy that you believe the BEA should consider.*

Paul Joy Response

I would like to share two key aspects of my background that underscore my commitment to education and youth development in Belmont.

1. **Championing Early Childhood Education**

Early childhood education is a personal passion of mine, as I've seen firsthand its transformative impact on young learners. My wife, Yuan, works at the Belmont Co-Op Nursery School, where I previously served as board chair and was deeply involved in fundraising efforts. Studies consistently show that high-quality early education improves long-term academic outcomes. I am committed to supporting the educators who lay this critical foundation. Belmont's youngest students deserve the best possible start, and I will advocate for policies and resources that strengthen early childhood programs across our community.

2. **Supporting Youth Through Extracurricular Activities**

As a member of the Belmont Soccer Association Board and its Practice and Clinic Coordinator for the past three years, I've worked to ensure that our 90+ teams have access to well-organized field space at locations like Winn Brook, Grove, PQ, and Town Field in both the fall and spring. I believe strongly in the value of extracurricular activities — be these sports, music, or community service — to foster teamwork, discipline, and confidence in our young people. These programs are essential for holistic development, and I will continue to prioritize opportunities that help Belmont's youth thrive both on and off the field.

These experiences have deepened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our schools and youth programs. As a Select Board member, I will bring this perspective to what I do in order to make sure that Belmont remains a community where every child has the chance to succeed.

8. The BEA is considering publicly endorsing a candidate. Are you interested in an endorsement?

Paul Joy: Yes