BELMONT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

2024 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate's Name ___Matthew Kraft_____ Office Sought _____School Committee___

Home Address___81 Taylor Rd_____ Telephone _____

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

Please review **MTA's Legislative Priorities and bills** and indicate if you agree or disagree with the BEA's support of this legislation.

Reinvest In Public Higher Education- The Cherish Act -

An Act committing to higher education the resources to insure a strong and healthy public higher education system

___ Agree with MTA/BEA's position
___ Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

The school committee's role is focused on K-12 education. This bill is beyond the scope of that role.

Reinvest in Public PreK-12 Education -

An Act relative to educator pay.

___ Agree with MTA/BEA's position

__ Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

Excellent teachers and support staff are at the heart of public education. I support competitive wages to attract and retain these professionals. However, it seems infeasible to pre-determine specific wage commitments with so much uncertainty about the school budget given the override on the ballot. I also have questions about grouping a broad range of support staff jobs that perform diverse roles into a single category; this could be challenging from both a school operations and a competitive compensation perspective.

End The High-Stakes Testing Regime -
An Act empowering students and schools to thrive.

__ Agree with MTA/BEA's position
__ Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

I agree that standardized tests cannot fully capture the complete picture of how students are performing in school. I also agree that teaching narrowly to a test, rather than the broader standards that tests are designed to assess, is detrimental to both teaching and learning. However, I do not think that eliminating the MCAS exam is necessarily the solution to these challenges. The MCAS is not perfect, but it provides valuable information to district leaders, principals, teachers, and parents. I believe that MCAS results can be used in productive ways to inform curricular decisions and instructional practices. I would like to work together to explore opportunities for addressing the challenges with standardized testing.

The Right To Strike For Public Workers -
An Act uplifting families and securing the right to strike for certain public employees

__ Agree with MTA/BEA's position
__ Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

Teachers have a right to make their voices heard. While I support forms of collective action, these actions must be balanced with our collective responsibility for students' learning and wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic has made all too clear the profound harm caused by prolonged school closures and the disproportionate impact they have on the most vulnerable students. I believe both teachers and districts should be committed to a collective bargaining process based on shared goals where differences are resolved through negotiation and, when necessary, mediation or arbitration. If elected to the school committee, I am committed to working collaboratively with the BEA to strengthen our schools.

Ensuring a Dignified Retirement
An Act to provide fair abd affordable public retiree benefits

___ Agree with MTA/BEA's position
___ Disagree with MTA/BEA's position

While I have read the Ensuring a Dignified Retirement Act closely, I would need far more detailed information about the long-term fiscal impact for Belmont to make an informed decision.

LOCAL ISSUES

Funding the Schools Belmont Students Deserve

We believe Belmont needs to support the superintendent's budget which includes Rollover + Reallocations + Needed Increases and not simply maintain a level head count. Teaching and learning has become more complex and additional support is needed to ensure student learning. The results of underfunding impacts our most vulnerable students and has led to an increase in out of district placement.

How will you be advocating for adequate school funding in order to pass a successful override vote this April?

I am a strong supporter of the override and have advocated for it since day one of my campaign. Failing to pass the override would have severe consequences for the range and quality of municipal services our town can provide. It would also require painful cuts to key staff positions and programs in our school budget. I will continue to use my platform as a candidate to educate voters about the importance of this vote and the value of investing in our town and public schools.

I also recognize that passing an override would place an additional financial burden on residents. We have an important responsibility to taxpayers to use this funding as effectively and efficiently as possible.

After the override vote, how will you support the continued development of the Belmont Public Schools in an effort to deliver an education that meets the needs of all of our students?

I am running for school committee because I am committed to providing an excellent education for all students in Belmont Schools. I will draw on my two decades of experience working to support public education to advocate for student-centered policies that are evidence-based and prepare students for future success.

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. Last year we also partnered 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?

Public education is critical to creating equal opportunity. I am committed to developing a more diverse teacher workforce and advocating for students from historically marginalized communities. I do this by serving as a mentor to students and researchers from diverse backgrounds and through my research, which examines how we can create school cultures where all students feel as though they belong and have the individualized supports that they need to succeed. As a parent, I have been supportive of Belmont Schools' increased focus on equity and inclusion and have open discussions with my own kids about issues of race and justice.

If elected, I would work closely with Chon'tel Washington, the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Belmont Schools, to strengthen our curriculum and training around inclusive educational practices. I appreciate the union's leadership in the district's work around equity and anti-racism and look forward to learning more about how the school committee can be an ally in these efforts.

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?

I see important potential benefits from the increased purchasing power offered by the GIC, but would need more detailed information about the long-term fiscal impact for Belmont to make an informed decision.

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?

As a former public school teacher, I care deeply about BPS educators and their success. The longstanding challenges of being a public school teacher have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) make it clear that many Belmont students come to schools with complex mental and emotional health needs. We need to ensure that students have the supports they need so that educators can focus their energy on delivering high-quality instruction.

I will listen and learn from BPS educators. I will build relationships and advance efforts to improve both teacher working conditions and student learning conditions. Teacher voice and leadership should play a key role in strengthening Belmont Schools and providing an excellent education for all students.

YOUR PRIORITIES

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

I am running for School Committee to serve our town and provide experienced, knowledgeable leadership during a critical time for our schools. I am deeply committed to public education, and personally invested in Belmont Schools. My two children attend Burbank elementary and will be students in Belmont Schools for the next decade. I believe my two decades of experience working to strengthen public education provide me with a valuable set of insights about how best to support the continued improvement of Belmont Schools.

As an economist of education and former teacher, I understand how public education works at many different levels. I started as a tutor and substitute teacher, taught high school humanities, and completed my doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I am now a professor at Brown University where I teach the economics of education and education policy analysis. My research focuses on concrete, practical questions about what works in K–12 education — questions that are directly relevant for Belmont Schools. This range of experience gives me rare insight into how district-level policy decisions impact students' and teachers' experiences inside the classroom.

I have a strong understanding of public education finance and the high-stakes tradeoffs districts face when budgets are tight. I have the experience necessary to help navigate us through this time of highly constrained resources without compromising the quality of our schools. I am fully committed to this work, both personally and professionally.

Please specify your top <u>three</u> priorities you plan to address.

I believe the overarching priority for the district is to develop a detailed and ambitious long-term vision for continuous improvement. We then need to examine whether our

current policies, practices, and budget allocations are aligned with a strategic plan to achieve our core goals.

My three specific top priorities are:

1. *Adopting up-to-date, research-based math and literacy curriculum coupled with teacher training and support for ongoing implementation so that instruction is both high-quality and aligned across classrooms.*
2. *Expanding the special education services we offer to provide more families the opportunity to remain in-district, while enhancing the quality of these services and reducing out-of-district placement costs.*
3. *Attracting and retaining excellent and diverse school leaders and teachers by improving district hiring practices and operational systems to allow educators to focus on core instructional priorities.*

Additional Information

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

I am a teacher at heart. Although I may not always agree with every aspect of BEA's positions, I will always seek to work collaboratively and to find common ground.

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

I would welcome the endorsement of the BEA.