

***Thank You Letter by Nicole Bartlett, Mashpee School Committee Chair***  
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As I prepare to step down after six years on the Mashpee School Committee, I can't help but reflect on the gratitude I feel for being elected by you, the Mashpee voters. Thank you. You did nothing less than change my life. As parents, days can often be consumed by the needs and interests of our children. Being a part of the school committee allowed me to learn about the needs and interests of your children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, neighbors and friends, and to play a small role in making their educational experience in Mashpee a positive one.

I learned about our kids! We celebrated athletes, artists, scientists, and civic-minded problem solvers. I heard directly from students about the rewards of participating in service projects through Project 351, or experienced their first trips to Europe and Washington, DC through Mashpee Public Schools. I met robots and turtles and even a Madagascar hissing cockroach (though I stopped short of touching it). We adjusted school start times and finally upgraded our stadium and track. We hired an outreach coordinator and opened a storefront in the Mashpee Commons to showcase our students and school pride. We piloted and then adopted a free summer camp for elementary kids. We sponsored Advanced Placement testing for every student and replaced water fountains with filling stations.

I met parents as we gave away Polar Cave ice cream (thanks Mark!) at July 4<sup>th</sup> and Octoberfest, manned booths at Community Night Out and attended open houses and picnics. I was a 'mystery reader' for Mrs. Fulone's pre-K class. I assisted with mock interviews, spoke to middle and high school students about my job, 8<sup>th</sup> grade civics classes about the school committee, signed hundreds of diplomas and addressed teachers, staff and families at convocations and graduations. I worked with the town to advance capital projects, operating budgets and promote student safety, and made some lifelong friends in the process.

I learned how to be a better advocate. I helped create the school committee's first budget narrative. I represented Mashpee Public Schools when we received a national equity award for our renewed partnership with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe in 2021. A year later, I introduced our first Mashpee Wampanoag school committee member as the plenary speaker at the American Indian Alaska Native Council breakfast. Attending conferences and meetings with members from other districts allowed me to share what we have in Mashpee and also introduced me to a wealth of information to help move Mashpee forward. Our ongoing partnership with the MWT has been a learning experience that I take with me into my work, friendships and family. It has taught me the importance of history and representation, language and resilience.

Working with the administration, staff and teachers for these last six years, I have seen the tremendous amount of work involved in caring for and educating our children. I respect and admire our teachers, paraprofessionals and other staff who have the challenging task of educating kids in today's complex environment, where kids definitely know more – and seem to need more – than ever before. I respect and admire our administrators and staff who work countless hours to oversee the almost 1,800 people in our buildings each day in partnership with the Mashpee Department of Public Works, Mashpee Police Department and Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Education Department. They are unsung heroes in our town, albeit imperfect ones. Like us, they are just trying to do their best every day. I am grateful that I had a front row seat for the harmony they all create together amidst so many challenges.

I now understand how Janice Mills spent 38 years on the Mashpee School Committee. It is hard to walk away from such a fulfilling experience, but I think it's time to give someone else a chance to receive what I received: the gift of learning and knowing people from different walks of life and backgrounds, working together for the benefit of our children. Real talk? It is work! But I promise you, it's worth it.