2021 Candidate Questionnaire
Select Board/School Committee

Candidate's Name __Jamal Carlos Saeh

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The Belmont Education Association (BEA) represents nearly 525 educators, administrators, administrative assistants, and education support personnel who work in the Belmont Public Schools. In addition, there are 500 Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) members who work in other locals 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. Included is the information we shared with members last year. Please email (belmonteducationassociation@gmail.com) this questionnaire with a high-resolution headshot before **March 5th**.

Thank you.

Andy MacAulay	John Sullivan
BEA Political Action Leader	BEA President
CMS (617) 851-5622	BHS (617) 365-1073

Below are **three priority legislative bills which the BEA/MTA have endorsed**. For each statement, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the BEA's position and then elaborate briefly to clarify your position.

Student Opportunity Act

On Nov. 20, 2019 the House and Senate approved the *Student Opportunity Act*, a historic bill backed by the MTA and other members of the **Fund Our Future coalition** that will increase state spending on public education by $1.5 billion over inflation as of 2027. It was approved unanimously to big applause. **The bill** then moved to Governor Charlie Baker, who announced on Nov. 25 that he would sign it the next day. Belmont's Chapter 70 Aide will increase by FY 2027 by $6,829,000 when compared to FY20. We believe the increase in Chapter 70 Funds should be spent and not saved.

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

_____ I support increased funding for schools; increased funding increases quality and equity and improves the working conditions for teachers. A significant increase in funding to BPS budget (~10%) requires significant long range planning to ensure alignment with a long term vision. I would look to start the planning now.

Cherrish Act.

The CHERISH Act, filed by Sen. Jo Comerford (D-Northampton) and Reps. Sean Garballey (D-Arlington) and Paul Mark (D-Peru), would reaffirm the state's commitment to public higher education by:

- Implementing the core finding of the 2014 Higher Education Finance Commission, resulting in more than $500 million in additional funding for public higher education. These new funds must supplement — not supplant — existing funding.
- Establishing in statute a fair and adequate minimum funding level for public higher education at no less than the FY01 per-student funding level, adjusted for inflation.
- Freezing tuition and fees for five years, as long as the Legislature appropriates the funds required to reach FY01 per-student funding levels in five years.

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

_____I believe in public education, and increasing funding for higher ed advances the goal of making education affordable to more students in the Commonwealth.

MCAS Moratorium and Changes to High-Stakes Testing

The MTA filed two bills on 1/28/21 – *"An Act Expanding Opportunities to Demonstrate Academic Achievement"* . *The bills are* **SD 409** and **HD 952**. These bills will do the following:

1. Eliminate the high stakes nature of the MCAS test for graduation – explicitly requiring multiple pathways to a competency determination for graduation.
2. Make a series of changes to the school accountability framework designed to de-emphasize the MCAS test, include locally-determined priorities, and incorporate the responsibility of the state and municipal government fully funding education
3. Create a grant program for local school district experimentation/creativity with school accountability

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

_____As a district, we need to follow state and federal mandates. The challenges with high stakes testing are well documented and solutions must include a change in regulations. Testing is a tool that can be a helpful metric at the population level, but is imperfect. It can't be the only tool, and especially at the individual level. "Teaching to the test" is inevitable when stakes are high and not a productive use of teachers' time; it limits the opportunities for teachers to be innovative and ability to focus on the individual students' needs. I welcome a more holistic assessment of students' abilities to increase access and enable opportunity for everyone to succeed.

LOCAL ISSUES

COVID & School Re-Opening

Since last March the pandemic has impacted teaching & learning in Belmont and we have worked through a Joint-Labor Management process to re-open schools. The decision of elected town leaders will continue to impact 2020/21 and possibly the 2021/21 school year. What are your priorities regarding in-person learning? How would you use your position to support educators to make decisions based on their experience in the classroom to allow for more time in school. Are there any specific items?

_____It is the duty of leaders to ensure adequate planning is in place for the spring and the fall. I understand how frustrating it is to teachers, students and their families to have plans that are constantly changing. It wastes resources and good will. I would first make sure that there's clarity on the strategic priorities, and plans generated in collaboration with the teachers and the community are ready to go.

Coming out of an 18mo of social distancing, the priority is to support social emotional connectedness, which is key to learning. We need to ensure meaningful in-person connections of students with students, and students with their teachers. Educators should be empowered to

work collaboratively to identify best practices and drive that work. As a SC member, my job is to make these efforts visible, increase understanding of the work and appreciation of the magnitude of the challenges, and help remove obstacles to implementation. I would look to maximize the use of the federal stimulus funding to support this effort.

Enrollment & Class Size

The BEA supports additional spending to address student enrollment and class size.

- Student enrollment in Belmont is projected to continue to increase 105 students a year.
- In 2019-20, 10% of K-4 classrooms exceeded the Belmont School Committee's Class Size Guidelines.
- Belmont continues to spend less per pupil than most towns in Massachusetts.

Do you support allocating a larger amount of funding to address increasing enrollment and class size? Why/Why Not? How would you secure additional funding for the BPS?

_____The challenges of larger class size are multifaceted. My goal is to work with the educators and the administrators to clarify the goals and build a strategy in order to align the right resource to improve the educational experience of teachers and students, especially the most vulnerable population. I support the override and believe that increased funding will increase services and improve class size.

Culturally Responsiveness & Racism

The union has placed a priority on confronting racism and white privilege in an effort to improve our schools. To address the student opportunity gap, the BPS has created a Culturally Responsive Teaching Program. Our union also created a Belmont Educators of Color and Allies, whose mission is 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.

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

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___I believe where diversity is lacking, equity is also lacking. I would like to learn more about the work of BECA, and efforts to use the Learning For Justice framework to rethink the curriculum. I have supported the hiring of diverse staff in the private sector and I support increasing efforts to recruit and retain qualified PoC in BPS. I fully support the equity task force and the equity audit. Our funding must align with our vision which is a reflection of our values. For that reason, I support the recruitment and empowerment of the equity director.
I am running because I believe that town government is enriched by the engagement of its diverse community. If elected, I would be the first immigrant, and first elected PoC to serve on the SC in Belmont.

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Substitute Coverage
Filling daily absences due to illness or personal leave is a longstanding issue in Belmont. Unfilled substitute requests disrupt the school day for students and staff. Belmont is not alone with other districts facing the same issue.

What would you do to address this issue?
_____I don't know enough about this issue, and would need to learn more about it to comment._____

Promoting Belmont Public Schools

What are your specific plans for promoting public education in Belmont?

To keep it BPS a top tier school and an education destination, I'd keep an eye on:

1. recruitment of experienced educators,

2. Identify & address challenges in retainment (focus on exit interviews & benchmark vs neighbors).

3: Support the curriculum sub-committee to increase collaborative learning and innovative curriculum

4: support community-partnership to broaden access to growth opportunities for students and teachers

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Engaging Parents and Citizens

What have you done or what will you do to engage and organize the parents and citizens in addressing the concerns associated with public education in Belmont?

_____To support the school reopening plans in the Fall, I partnered with Belmont experts to identify innovative, cost effective, developmentally appropriate covid-testing technology to provide peace of mind to staff, and families. I looked for a win:win solution. The proposal included getting a baseline testing of the entire BPS community (~4700), weekly testing of teachers, and weekly random sampling of the student population. I partnered with the community to identify sources of funding to reduce the burden on the district. I submitted the proposal to the SC in September with the goal to be deployed in days.

Your Priorities

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

_____I believe the SC can benefit from having a diverse set of skills and points of view. My experience as a leader in the pharmaceutical industry provides a complementary skill set that is needed during the pandemic; I pride myself on being engaged, and I want to help the SC make

better data-driven decisions. As an immigrant, with children who went through Burbank, Chenery and who are now in BHS, I look at the world and the experience of my children at BPS with a different lens, one that is often absent and is important to the aspiration and vision of BPS.

Please specify your top three priorities you plan to address.

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1. Alleviate the social emotional learning barrier
2. Enable opportunities for transforming the educational experience for teachers and students with the reconfiguration of BPS
3. Implement the output of the equity audit.

Additional Information

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