

Candidate for School Committee
Tammy Wong Bigelow

1. Please tell us about yourself and why you are running for office.

I am running for office because I want to see Waltham's public school system grow and improve, so that our children and young people have a competitive edge and are successful when they graduate and move on to their colleges, internships, jobs, and any other opportunities that present themselves. I have three children, two of whom are in the Waltham Dual Language School with my youngest starting kindergarten there next school year. I have a vested interest in supporting our schools to reach greater potential.

2. What are the two most important education issues in Waltham, and how will you address those issues if you are elected to School Committee?

The two most important issues in Waltham are:

1.
Our teachers are working on an expired contract. Until we can negotiate something fair and competitive, no matter how much we want our schools to improve alongside our neighboring communities, we will not be able to hire and retain high-quality and highly-qualified educators. Without a fair and competitive contract, we will continue to see programs, like the CTE program at the high school, and electives shortchanged, class sizes increase, and children in special education fall through the cracks of large caseloads.

As a former teacher and teacher's union member, I know how it feels to work on an expired contract. I have also worked long hours, picketed in front of an office building, and awaited anxiously for a new deal to go through. If elected and if the contract is still not fully negotiated, I would request to review the full documents from both sides along with the budgetary constraints that seem to be at the heart of all negotiations. I would do my best to fully understand the situation from both angles and advocate for the best deal for the teachers, in turn making it the best deal for our city. At the end of the day, we need to retain the excellent teachers we do have and recruit other great teachers.

2.

The expansion of our preschool, special education programs, and the Waltham Dual Language School is another important issue. I put all these together because at the bottom of these issues is resources. We listen to what experts say the schools and programs need to have them all do well and to expand, but then we still cut the budget. We should look at how much our schools and our city can afford and really weigh them with the return on investment of our young people's education and mental preparedness for their futures. 2 hours and 15 minutes is not enough to have an autistic child or any child for that matter in a preschool program. After the wait time and transition times, there is barely any learning time. We need full day preschool for all the children who attend Waltham Public School preschools. This will make it easier for working parents and better in the long run for children's mental growth. Our caring and professional special education staff are fully loaded and split between schools. That is not good for their well-being, nor is it good for the students who need the services. They need people who are not overloaded so even more time can be spent on supporting their success. Lastly, the Waltham Dual Language School was told that they would be able to expand now that they are in the old high school. However, every School Committee meeting has no updates on this. But if the school expanded, we would be allowing more students opportunities to be bilingual in Spanish and English early on and alleviate other schools' populations, which can lower their class sizes.

If elected to the School Committee, I would ask to review our budget and ask about the cuts made. I would advocate for the programs, departments, and schools to receive the proper funding and question cuts made if the School Committee approves a budget. Spending money is not a popular topic, but when our students benefit, so does our city.