

Candidate Climate Forum

2019

School Committee Responses



School Committee candidates were asked to respond to these questions via online submission. Responses are listed alphabetically by candidate's last name. Answers are shown below as written. If a candidate is not listed below, they did not submit a response.

Question 1: As we have been witnessing the powerful message of the world's children, including many local student leaders, about the importance of acting on climate change, what role can you take as a school committee to teach our children about climate change and how it will impact every part of their lives in the future, and also to support and encourage them in their advocacy?

Ellenor Barish, candidate Ward 6 - I believe that educators should have the flexibility and autonomy in their classrooms to explore the subjects that they and their students are passionate about. That said, I would certainly encourage teachers of all subjects to incorporate age-appropriate activities that relate the scientific, political, economic, and humanitarian issues around climate change. Activism around climate change can serve as an excellent learning experience. Some of that activism can take place in the classroom, but I would support excused absences (as the district did in September) so that students can participate in activist events taking place in our community and beyond during the school day.

Andre Green, candidate Ward 4 for reelection - It is no coincidence that the two largest youth movements of the last several years (and arguably ever)-the gun control walkouts of 2018 and the climate walkout of 2019 were locally co-led by Somerville High students. Somerville Public Schools sees our foremost goal as the preparing of students to be active contributors to society. We teach Somerville students to be scientifically literate (hence the understanding of the importance of climate change), civically engaged (hence volunteering to take action on it) and community minded (thus often doing a better job than we adults of keeping intersectionality in mind).

SPS is not, and cannot legally be, in the business of helping it's students "take sides" in political issues. Fortunately on an issue as vital as climate change, we don't have to be. If we're doing our job, they will learn about the issue and how they can affect change. We've seen that when we do that, all we have to do is get out of their way. So going forward the best way to raise the next generation of climate activists is to make sure ALL Somerville students--not just privileged ones--get the education that will empower them to lead on this critical issue.

Carrie Normand, candidate Ward 7 for reelection - Whether the topic is concerned with climate change, gun violence, or equitable learning opportunities, school committee members must help provide opportunities for students to develop public speaking and written advocacy. This is important because clear and effective communication skills are embedded in the academic standards expected of every content area. In classrooms, that means teaching students how to conduct research, evaluate information, and then make an effective argument. Beyond the classroom, that means giving students opportunities to actually do what they have been taught. When students offer public comment at Somerville School Committee meetings, I make it a point to welcome them and coach them through mechanics of public speaking (previewing the agenda, how to use the microphone, etc). Prior to those meetings, I collaborate with our student School Committee representatives to develop their leadership and advocacy skills so that this public speaking moment is more than a report of events and a public, rather a consistent opportunity for student voice. Public speaking is an important skill, as well as a notable performance assessment. No matter what the topic of the cause is, I will continue to look for ways to advocate for more opportunities for young adults to speak publicly. And someday soon I hope those moments can be captured as evidence of their learning, providing a means to award “credit” toward graduation requirements.

Sarah Phillips, candidate Ward 3 - As a school committee member, with oversight over budget, policy, and the superintendent, I would do the following to improve our efforts to educate students about climate change and encourage student advocacy.

It is my understanding that Somerville teachers are currently developing a comprehensive science curriculum in K-8. If elected I would encourage the Superintendent to prioritize developing the climate change portion of this curriculum. I would also ensure the school department’s budget includes sufficient resources for professional development, consultation, and materials related to this curriculum and the climate change curriculum that already exists at the high school level and in our career and technical education program.

As a life-long community activist with a background in grassroots organizing, I strongly support encouraging student advocacy around climate change. If elected, I will prioritize all sustainability projects brought to my attention by a group of students. If elected, I will also work to ensure the school department collaborates with city leaders to ensure students are represented on important climate-related bodies like the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change and the Climate Forward Ambassadors program. Finally, I will support excusing students for leaving school with parental permission or as part of a school-sponsored field trip for climate-related advocacy and organizing.

Tara Ten Eyck, candidate Ward 7 - Last year, I had the opportunity to help my 11-year-old and a small group of his friends advocate for change. They were upset when their school had suddenly removed all of its recycling bins. This led to a discussion about recycling, reusing, and reducing all kinds of waste, including food waste. I helped them prepare a presentation for their teachers at East Somerville Community School. I encouraged them to bring their advocacy for recycling and composting to

Superintendent Skipper, so they also drafted public comments they later shared at a school committee meeting. As a school committee member, I would support teachers integrating climate change specifically into their curriculum and students participating in events like the Climate Strike. Let's empower our students to create change!

Question 2: While the High School will not live up to its initial goal of being a Net Zero Energy Building, are there goals to achieve this over time? Can school facilities begin to become "living labs" for students and teachers as well as community members to learn about sustainability measures that can be undertaken in the community at large?

Ellenor Barish, candidate Ward 6 - I would support any measures that will make our schools (not just the new high school) less reliant on fossil fuel derived energy sources. It would be wonderful to involve SPS students, educators, and the broader community in this process. This type of real-world application of what our students are learning in the classroom has the potential of being an exciting and inspiring experience - in addition to reducing our City's carbon footprint.

Andre Green, candidate Ward 4 for reelection - As a leading champion for the high school's approval. I was a strong proponent of the (again student led!) push for geothermal power for the school, and was deeply disappointed when that effort failed. Although the School Committee doesn't have direct authority over the physical plant of buildings (we have operational control, but the buildings themselves are purview of DPW), I hope that we can still explore options like solar power at the new SHS and ultimately at all SPS buildings to reduce our dependency on non-renewable energy sources.

Further, the new Education Plan for the High School calls for a marked expansion of project based learning (which will reach down to the K-8 programming as projects become a key part of high school readiness) environmental projects and sustainability efforts will naturally become an integral part of SHS students' education. And as a key part of our vision for the new High School and new Ed plan has always been that students should treat all of Somerville as their school, we are eager to see what partnerships with the larger community those efforts will engender.

Carrie Normand, candidate Ward 7 for reelection - Schools can be living labs for students and teachers in many ways. School cafeterias are an important learning lab available to students of all ages. While we have initiated composting as a way to deal with waste, as a school district and city, there is a lot of work to be done on reducing food, utensils and paper waste. Learning opportunities in the natural environment, both on school grounds and offsite, needs to be expanded. As School Committee member

and a citizen, I support this culture change, yet I realize too that we must be mindful of the many change initiatives schools are expected to address, and then pace the expectation of meeting said goals accordingly.

Sarah Phillips, candidate Ward 3 - I would love to see our schools become “living sustainability labs.” In addition to helping students, teachers, and community members learn about sustainability measures, I would want our labs to emphasize environmental justice and service-learning.

If elected, I would encourage the school department to build relationships with faculty at local universities and leaders in the business and nonprofit communities who are conducting research and developing solutions to improve sustainability and foster environmental justice.

I would also fund two grant programs. One program would support Somerville teachers as they develop service-learning and project-based units on issues of sustainability and environmental justice in partnership with local faculty and business/non-profit leaders. The other grant program would support student-led projects related to sustainability and environmental-justice.

Tara Ten Eyck, candidate Ward 7 - I do not personally have the expertise to understand a lot of these complicated issues, but I firmly believe we should establish goals to reduce energy use and greenhouse emissions over time. Simple things that come to mind are district-wide policy changes like establishing a no-plastic-bottle rule within schools (while providing students with their own reusable water bottles), doing away with single-use plastics and wrappers in school cafeterias, and collecting rainwater. Policies like these will require upfront investment in facilities. Cafeteria kitchens will need cutlery, dishes, and dishwashers plus changes in lunch procedures (acknowledging the Brown School does not even have a cafeteria). School hallways will also need to be equipped with sport water bottle filling stations. In terms of curriculum and living labs, teachers and students can design, install, and maintain school gardens and green rooves in schools that can support them. East Somerville Community School has a small green roof already. We should look beyond our in-district resources too. Penn State has cut its greenhouse gas emissions by half over the last 15 years and would be a useful model for the City of Somerville as a whole as well as our school facilities. Closer to home, we could seek partnerships with local organizations that are tackling climate change, like Tufts, MIT, and Greentown Labs, all right here in our backyard. Getting our buildings closer to net zero emissions will require consultation from experts.

Question 3: What are your thoughts on creating more food gardening on school grounds, as both a learning opportunity and to supplement nutrition requirements?

Ellenor Barish, candidate Ward 6 - Food gardening on school grounds has provided great learning - and tasting - opportunities in our schools. Additionally, the time children and their teachers spend in the garden can have positive impacts on their mental health. These benefits extend to students' families and the broader community who have access to the gardens outside of school hours. Food grown in our school gardens might be incorporated into school meals and after school snacks, distributed to students' families at a free "farmer's market", or perhaps donated to a local food pantry or soup kitchen. I like the idea of expanding our school gardens, but it would need to be done in an intentional and thoughtful manner so that the food produced does not go to waste. The easiest way to accomplish this might be to partner with existing local organizations like Groundworks Somerville (which has supported school gardens in the past). Our school gardens could become satellite gardens to their South Street Farm, for example. This type of collaboration and strengthening of community connections might provide the added benefit of increased community involvement in our schools and consequently deeper community support.

Andre Green, candidate Ward 4 for reelection - I would be open to any plans that expand gardening on school grounds. I have been a leading proponent of expanding and strengthening our partnership with Groundwork Somerville for example. Like GWS, I would especially like to see us explore culturally relevant foods for our diverse population, and aiming that food towards very real issues of food instability among Somerville families.

As far as nutrition requirements, while I am open to exploring it, I am mindful of the fact that our food programming is driven in large part by the funding (and requirements) of the Federal School Lunch Program. Given the priority I have made about moving the district to Universal Free Lunch, I would defer to our nutrition and legal staff to determine what effect, if any, integrating food gardening into our lunch program would have on that vital funding.

Carrie Normand, candidate Ward 7 for reelection - Gardening on school grounds is effective and enjoyable use of project-based learning. It also provides opportunities to show evidence of progress toward meeting academic standards in a variety of historically divorced content areas, such as Earth Science, nutrition, math, botany, and social skills standards. I think it is important to identify as many interdisciplinary learning opportunities as possible. It is a double win when gardening on school grounds can be used to feed the cafeteria's salad bar, another way to reduce costs. Next Wave/ Full Circle, West Somerville Neighborhood School, Arthur D. Healey School, and other schools maintain onsite gardens as part of the student learning demonstrating how nature can be incorporated into our urban settings. I will continue to support those efforts.

Sarah Phillips, candidate Ward 3 - We can and should create more food gardening on school grounds. I'd like to see us integrate our school gardens with the city's community garden program. Instead of paying the city's community garden fee, gardeners could be given a free plot in exchange for "adopting" a classroom of students. Classrooms could

garden with their gardener throughout the year and gardeners and students could eat a portion of the produce they grew together at an annual or bi-annual meal. Nutrition teachers could use the partnership to teach students about healthy eating, while guest speakers might talk about sustainable farming and the way our choices about food affect the sustainability of our environment.

Tara Ten Eyck, candidate Ward 7 - Absolutely. I am 100% in favor of using school grounds to create more food gardening. I support any way that food can be used in schools. I support all educational opportunities afforded by the teaching of and learning about raising a garden. Ideally, any food harvested from a school garden would be used in the school's cafeteria to feed the very students who planted, watered, and nurtured the plants to maturity. People, kids and adults alike, are increasingly disconnected from their food sources, so any opportunity to connect children to the process is one that should not be missed. I think there is a larger issue to address though. Our School Lunch Program provides lunches, but much of the food is not freshly prepared, comes in plastic wrappers, and students are forced to take food items they do not want (presumably to meet the nutritional requirements) which are then casually tossed in the garbage (or compost now that Garbage to Garden compost services have rolled out). I do not think our current lunch program supports our community values. So, yes, let's have food gardens on our school grounds, but let's reform the School Lunch Program policies and allocate resources so school cafeterias can prepare fresh food and reduce waste simultaneously. When that happens, students will see the direct connection between food grown on campus and the lunches prepared and served to them.

Question 4: How can the natural environment on school grounds be more integrated into the learning experience? Are school grounds currently fit to perform that role?

Ellenor Barish, candidate Ward 6 - The natural environment around our schools can certainly be more integrated into the learning experience. The school gardens are a great example of how this can be achieved. Many of our schools have primarily paved or rubberized surfaces with little natural green space or growing plants and where there are green areas, they are often separated from the spaces students most frequently use for recess. Several of the school yards will be undergoing renovations in the coming years. I would support plans that increase green space and/or improve access to existing green space. I suspect that one challenge regarding the integration of the natural environment into the learning experience is that it is harder for teachers to keep students safe in our schools' green spaces. There might be multiple entrances, barriers to sight lines, and natural hazards. Perhaps providing additional adult supervision for planned outdoor learning experiences would empower teachers to better take advantage of the opportunities that do exist.

Andre Green, candidate Ward 4 for reelection - As we upgrade our landscapes, the movement towards "outdoor classrooms" is, to me a welcome one. As a next step we can explore better use of natural, unprogrammed space into our school yards and by

extension into school programming. This is not something our schoolyards are currently configured to do--too many of our schools are still surrounded by concrete seas. But as we address that in the years to go, we should do so in a way that recognizes our need to depave.

Carrie Normand, candidate Ward 7 for reelection - As a School Committee member, I am committed to fostering dialogue across stakeholders. Once I have had a chance to listen to the various perspectives on this topic, I can better advocate for meaningful shifts in both instructional and operational practices. More gardens is one idea for providing more access to the natural environment in an urban school setting. I would like to see a community discussion where we brainstorm ways to create more extended learning opportunities, during which students can integrate the natural environment into their learning experience. When we award credit for learning that happens beyond the parameters of the school grounds, we are more able to optimize on the numerous natural environments that are within Somerville's proximity, such as the Mystic River and the Fells. Though there may be some logistical issues to flush out, identifying where and how the natural environment can be incorporated into the learning experience, would be more effective if the conversation looked beyond the actual boundaries of the school's property.

Sarah Phillips, candidate Ward 3 - I believe better integrating the natural environment into our existing grounds requires finding more space. For example, we could replace landscaping with pollinator and vegetable gardens. We could also explore the possibility of building gardens and outdoor classrooms on our roofs.

As we renovate playgrounds, we can prioritize designs where the natural environment is more fully integrated from the beginning. For example, we could commit to using natural materials for the ground cover under playground equipment or develop adventure playgrounds where kids use natural materials to play and build.

Tara Ten Eyck, candidate Ward 7 - Across the district, there is a lot of inequity in terms of school grounds and access to natural resources. Several school grounds are not fit to perform the role of integrating nature and learning. A great place to start, would be to follow through on the \$140,000 grant awarded by the Community Preservation Act in March 2018 to the Brown School and West Somerville Community School for landscape design and improvement of their schoolyards.