



## 2025 School Committee Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Renika Montgomery-Tamakloe

Office Sought: Ward 3 School Committee Representative for Northampton, MA

Website:

Facebook:

Instagram:

Twitter:

BlueSky:

### (A) Your Candidacy

#### 1. Why are you running, and what would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?

I'm running for School Committee because every child deserves access to a safe, inclusive, and empowering education, and I know that systemic change is possible when we center equity, listen deeply, and lead with both strategy and heart. As a healthcare consultant, epidemiologist, and longtime advocate for marginalized communities, I've spent my career transforming complex systems to better serve people. Now, I'm bringing that same commitment home to Northampton.

My top three priorities are as follows:

- Addressing the issues in the recent DESE report about tracking special education services across the district. Approximately 25% of the time last year, 7th and 8th graders on IEPs in Northampton did not receive the 1:1 services to which they were entitled. That is a direct result of cutting necessary positions from the schools, as these missed services were primarily due to staff absences.
- Restore and expand electives across grade levels. Work with school leaders to identify which electives have been cut and prioritize their return—especially in the arts, technical education, and wellness. Push for updated equipment and materials so students can engage deeply and creatively, not just minimally.

- Launch a district-wide youth mental health initiative. Drawing from my background as an epidemiologist, I would partner with organizations like Safe Passage and Cooley Dickinson Hospital to expand trauma-informed services, peer support programs, and school-based counseling. Advocate for dedicated funding to ensure every school has access to mental health professionals and culturally responsive care.

## 2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I've worked for years as a college coach for underrepresented minorities, helping them transfer from two-year to four-year colleges. In 2018, I co-authored a book on the transfer process. I've worked with the Diversity and Inclusion Center at Easthampton High School, helping develop and run Black History programming. I've also served as a Commissioner on the Northampton Reparations Study Commission for the past two years.

## (B) Open-Ended Policy Questions

### 1. Massachusetts has wide racial, income-based, and language disparities in educational outcomes. How would you evaluate your school district's work to improve educational equity? What additional steps would you advocate for?

Northampton is a community that aspires to justice—but we must also confront the disparities that continue to impact our students and families. There is a thin veneer of civility that overlays very entrenched biased beliefs. From racial and economic inequities in academic outcomes to rising housing insecurity and historic patterns of exclusion, these challenges require both courage and collaboration.

As a commissioner on the Northampton Reparations Study Commission, I've been deeply engaged in understanding the structural and historical forces that have shaped our city's inequities—from redlining to unequal access to public resources. That work informs my belief that public education must be a driver of equity and repair.

In addition, I regularly facilitate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion trainings that create space for critical dialogue, organizational accountability, and practical strategies to advance justice in our schools and institutions. I've seen firsthand how open, structured conversations can lead to real change.

As a School Committee Member, I would advocate for the following:

- Champion restorative justice and culturally responsive education. I will advocate for restorative practices that center healing, accountability, and connection over punishment. Our students need curriculum and school cultures that affirm their identities and experiences.
- Promote equity in resource allocation. Every student—regardless of race, income, or ability—deserves access to opportunity. I'll support equity-focused budgeting that prioritizes the needs of historically underserved learners, mental health supports, and enrichment programs.
- Deepen community partnerships and reparative efforts. I'll continue working with the Reparations Study Commission and local leaders to identify and act on strategies that address generational harm. Justice is not a passive value—it's a practice that demands investment.
- Create inclusive avenues for student and family voices. We must actively include those most impacted by educational policy in shaping it. I'll champion meaningful engagement, language access, and transparency across decision-making processes.

**2. Earlier this year, the Trump administration repealed a Biden-era policy that protected schools from immigration enforcement. What steps would you take to ensure that schools remain a safe and welcoming place for all students, regardless of immigration status?**

Schools should be a safe place for all our children, regardless of immigration status. I would do the following to ensure it:

- Clarify our School District's position of Non-Cooperation with ICE, supporting the adoption of a district-wide policy that:
  - Prohibits Northampton Public Schools from sharing student or family information with ICE under any circumstances.
  - Ensures that school staff are trained annually on this policy and on how to respond if ICE tries to engage with any school.
  - Communicates this commitment clearly and regularly to all families in multiple languages, reinforcing that our schools are sanctuaries, not surveillance sites.
- Strengthen school-based emergency preparedness and legal response, advocating for every school to have:
  - An up-to-date safety plan that includes protocols for sheltering students in non-public spaces if ICE is reported in the vicinity.

- A district-wide partnership with immigrant legal aid organizations to provide rapid-response legal aid to families affected by detention and deportation.
- Creation of multilingual emergency folders for families, distributed through the schools, which has pertinent information such as Know Your Rights, legal aid contacts, and family preparedness plans.
- Expand school community support systems for immigrant families, such as:
  - Hosting regular Know Your Rights workshops in schools, led by groups such as Pioneer Valley Workers Center and the Center for New Americans.
  - A district mutual aid fund to support students whose caregivers are detained or deported, covering essentials like food, transportation, and housing.
  - Inclusion of immigrant student voices in district decision-making, through advisory councils or listening sessions, to ensure policies reflect lived experiences.

**3. The Trump administration has been targeting LGBTQ students' civil rights. What steps would you take to ensure that schools remain a safe and welcoming place for all students, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation?**

Every student deserves to feel safe, affirmed, and valued in their school community—no exceptions. As a School Committee member, I would work to ensure that our policies, practices, and culture actively support LGBTQ+ students and staff. This includes:

- Strengthening inclusive policies: I would advocate for clear, enforceable anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect students based on gender identity and sexual orientation and ensure regular training of staff to uphold these policies.
- Expanding affirming curriculum and resources: I would support the integration of LGBTQ+ history, literature, and perspectives into our curriculum.
- Investing in staff training and student support: I would push for ongoing professional development around gender inclusivity, trauma-informed care, and restorative practices while expanding access to counselors and support groups for LGBTQ+ youth.

**4. What role do you see for the school district in the city's response to climate change?**

The school district has a responsibility to sustainably maintain its existing infrastructure, as well as invest in things like solar panels and alternative heating systems (where applicable). New buildings would need to meet LEED certifications and only be built if existing infrastructure were insufficient.

**5. How would you model transparency and accountability if elected?**

I would have regularly scheduled office hours, as well as have my email and phone number available to constituents. I believe in meeting with and talking to the people that I am representing, not hiding behind bureaucracy.

**6. How will you engage stakeholders, including students, in budget decisions?**

Meetings, both virtual and in-person. Surveys sent out to the entire school community. I believe that many more people would be engaged in the process if they had access to it.

**7. How will you use your position to advocate at the state level for increasing education funding, especially to provide additional support for students in historically marginalized districts/communities?**

I would love for there to be more collaborative efforts between the state and local government, as Northampton bears the brunt of funding its schools. Having said that, I realize that the state has made their position on additional funding clear, and we should pursue that avenue secondary to increasing local funding for the schools.

Having said that, Northampton is not poor, and Ch 70 funding must focus on those districts that have higher needs than ours. I would continue to lobby for a funding increase across the board, but that is a long-term goal.

**8. How will you use your position to combat the Trump administration's war on public education?**

The best defense against the war on public education is a good offense. Fully funded and staffed schools with local revenues will be able to weather the storm much better than those that are not.

How do we fund them? By doing the following:

- Prioritize needs based on equity and impact.  
When resources are limited, we must be guided by our values. I will support budgeting that centers the most vulnerable students, protects core instructional services, and restores critical programs like electives and mental health supports. I'll also push for updated equipment and technology, so our classrooms reflect the world our students are preparing to lead.
- Elevate student and educator voices in budget decisions.  
Our students and staff know what's working—and what's missing. I'll ensure their insights shape our priorities, and I'll fight for transparency and accountability in how every dollar is spent.
- Support responsible local revenue strategies.  
I will engage the community in honest, transparent conversations about what it takes to fund the schools our students deserve. That includes exploring Proposition 2½ overrides when necessary (but only if permanently dedicated to the schools), as well as creative partnerships like the Smith PILOT and including Mass General Brigham in the conversation. I'll also advocate for using city stabilization funds strategically—without relying on one-time fixes for recurring costs.
- Advocate for long-term structural change at the state level.  
I understand that equity requires systemic solutions. I will work with fellow School Committee members, city leaders, and our state delegation to push for reforms to the Chapter 70 funding formula, which currently disadvantages communities like ours. We need a funding system that accounts for inflation, rising special education costs, and the actual cost of educating every child.

### (C) **Yes/No Policy Questions**

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES**
2. Do you support police-free schools? **YES**
3. Do you support teaching comprehensive, medically accurate, consent-based, LGBTQ-inclusive sex ed in schools? **YES**
4. According to the American Library Association, in 2022 there were at least 45 attempts to restrict access to books in MA schools, disproportionately books that speak to the experiences of LGBTQ students and students of color. Would you oppose such book-banning efforts if they occurred in your city? **YES**

**(D) Additional Comments**

I am a product of public schools. I am a HeadStart graduate who made it all the way to Yale on the back of my public school education. Fully funded public schools are the backbone of society, and I think especially in these trying times, we should be fortifying our schools, not gutting them.