



## 2025 School Committee Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Robbie Saner Sullivan

Office Sought: School Committee At-Large

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### (A) Your Candidacy

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

I have a deep love for and commitment to my hometown, and a belief that public schools are critical to a community's health. Public schools must be saved — There's a five-alarm fire. My top three priorities will be: to contribute to and build a forward-thinking body based on respect and collaboration.; to hire and retain a superintendent who is dynamic, who is treated with respect, and who leads and responds to the committee; and to advocate for a delegation to learn from new best practices in similar Massachusetts school districts.

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

I am a product of Northampton's K-12 public schools. I then volunteered at every level of my own children's public school experience In Northampton — preschool through graduation from 1998-2016 — with the PTO, on field trips, in the classroom, in the office, at Field Day, and at every community fundraiser. In 2009, in an effort to offset student sports fees and replace aging sports equipment and uniforms, I co-founded the nonprofit Northampton Athletic Booster Club - still active today.

I've spent the bulk of my adult life caring for others, as a nurse, with Hospice, as an elder advocate, and now an end-of-life doula. I know how to hold space

for people in emotional and challenging situations, and then how to take action.

In 2019, I was an appointed member of the city's Charter Review Committee, working over ten months to review and update the charter, as required every nine years by state law. The Committee held 14 public meetings where the Charter was reviewed in its entirety. Our report was delivered to Mayor David Narkewicz and the City Council and included the following recommended changes: the lowering of the voting age to 16, and adoption of Ranked Choice Voting for use in all municipal elections; the provision that all residents, including non-citizens, may vote in municipal elections; and the change of the City Clerk's position to an appointed office. Our recommended changes were unanimously approved by the City Council.

In 2021, following the 2020 census, I was appointed to the Redistricting Committee. Due to population growth in Northampton, I represented Ward 2 and worked with other ward representatives to help the city redraw its precincts and wards to ensure equal representation.

## **(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?**

The School Committee is obligated to monitor the data released by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in these areas. The data is disaggregated by race, income, disabilities, and language. It would be critical for me, as a member, to question the district administrators about the efforts toward equity and to support initiatives that address inequities through instructional practices and family engagement.

- 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?**

Northampton is a "Sanctuary City" and has a long-standing policy of non-cooperation with enforcement of federal immigration laws. I strongly support these actions and believe that it is the role of the School Committee to help the City provide the strongest possible legal protections to all its

students regardless of their immigration status. I also think that we should support development of curriculums and a school environment that emphasize the critical roles – past and present – that our country’s immigrants have played in the growth of this nation and our society, and that reflect the values and needs of our various immigrant communities to the greatest extent possible. Wherever we can, we need to instill in our students the understanding that we all flourish when we’re all respected.

**3. The Trump administration has been targeting LGBTQ students’s 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?**

Northampton has adopted policies and ordinances, bolstered by resolutions and city actions, intended to promote and protect LGBTQ+ rights, and has declared itself a “Sanctuary City for Transgender and Gender Diverse People.” I am committed to continuing to promote these values in our community. The School Committee must work with other City agencies to ensure the civil rights of our LGBTQ+ students. We also need to continue supporting a culture and curriculum in the schools that promotes acceptance and mutual understanding and that is sensitive to the specific needs of our LGBTQ+ students. An environment that encourages diversity, compassion, and self-expression will benefit all our students. Finally, this community has extensive resources to support our LGBTQ+ residents which we can integrate into our students’ school experience.

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

The School Committee should promote the development of curriculum that improves student awareness of the issues related to climate change including its causes, impacts, and possible solutions, and to increase student participation in curriculum development and city-wide initiatives to address these issues. The Northampton school department owns/operates a significant portion of the City’s capital infrastructure. The School Committee needs to work with the School Department and other City departments in adopting strategic goals for climate response and to procure and manage major renovations and new construction with a focus on energy conservation and sustainability.

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

I will make myself widely available to talk - through email, phone, and in-person. I will listen and ask questions. I will explain each decision-making process in detail based on all gathered information, including options presented, and how and why I arrived at my decision.

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

I will answer all questions to the best of my ability, and find answers when I don't have them. I'll offer accurate, data-backed information to help with a basic understanding of not only how the schools budget is arrived at, but also how that budget fits within a holistic municipal budget that serves an entire city's needs. I'd like the School Committee to talk with students about additional ways to include their voices throughout the budget process, uninfluenced by parents and teachers..

**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?**

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees holds a "Day on the Hill" for members to hear what is being debated in the state legislature as well as meet with representatives and senators, and to lobby for a district's needs. But this year, this important opportunity to be heard was scheduled on May 6, well after the efforts of MASC would have any impact on decision-making. I will lobby MASC to lobby for a Day on the Hill that occurs much earlier in the budget process!

I will stay in regular touch through email and phone calls with our legislators, as well as request meetings when legislators are in town. I will also encourage my community to organize letter-writing and phone call campaigns.

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

I will use my position to advocate at the state level for education, supporting the governor and the legislators who are standing up for our state's public schools. We are fortunate to have elected officials who don't need to be convinced, but they do need our unflagging support.

**(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**

*(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)*