



## 2025 School Committee Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Tiffany Jewell

Office Sought: At-Large School Committee

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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'm running for school committee because I know our schools-- the buildings, the teachers and staff, and the learners.

I'm running because I will represent the interests of the students, their caregivers, and the community rather than the interests of the status quo. I bring a perspective that is much needed on our School Committee-- I'm a Black biracial woman who grew up in a working poor family and the daughter of an immigrant.

I am running because I know how to support learners and schools to grow and be ready for the future. It's what I do. I'm not new to this work.

I'm running because we need folks who will center the learners in all the decisions we make and I will do that.

My top three priorities if elected to serve my city--

1. Rebuilding our community's trust in our schools.

2. Working to review and create clear plans, protocols, and procedures that accompany the somewhat legally vague policies. Nothing should ever be

implied. This is how we keep each other safe and how we keep ourselves accountable.

3. Reviewing the school budget and strongly advocating for our schools to be fair and just, to be staffed and resourced so we can provide our learners with the education that is their right and is our responsibility.

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

I'm an educator and have been teaching in the Valley for twenty years and thanks to NEF grants, I spent four years working in our elementary schools and JFK, meeting with and working alongside teachers, collaborating with principals, and teaching the learners in our community about identity, justice, and activism. (I know where ALL the adult bathrooms are in our elementary schools!)

I've also served on local and national boards centered around education and literacy. I write books about social justice for young folks, including *This Book Is Anti-Racist* and *Everything I Learned About Racism I Learned In School*.

And, I'm a caregiver of two kids in our public schools, one at Jackson Street and one at JFK. I served on the JSS council for four years and have served on local and national boards centered around education and literacy.

## **(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?**

Currently, our school district is failing our English Language Learners and our students of the global majority. Our graduation rate for English Language Learners is 54.5% compared to the overall student population rate being 94.2%. That's a giant difference! We were found out of compliance for multiple reasons regarding our ability to provide our students with disabilities the services that are their right to receive. We have some good strong recommendations from DESE and from a CASE study that will help our district to better support our most vulnerable students. We need to create a better system that allows for our district leaders to notice our strengths and areas to grow and make changes. We have a long way to go in regards to education equity. I will advocate for not only equitable funding from the state, but for

equitable funding from the city (which we currently do not have). We need to hear from teachers and students how we're doing and not wait for the superintendent's report at school committee meetings. I would also advocate for continuous training and support for all district employees around anti-bias antiracist professional development.

**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?**

Our city is a sanctuary city. If elected, I will work closely with the city council and school councils to ensure that the safety of our students and their caregivers is always considered. We need to have better and clear plans for school staff to know what to do in situations if/when ICE comes and ongoing training as school staff does change over time. I would also love to host community teach-ins in our schools so folks can understand the best ways we can keep everybody safe. Sometimes the smallest thing- like organizing a walking school bus- can have a big impact on a neighborhood's safety!

**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?**

We must always keep each other safe. More and more families are moving to our city and our state because we are one of the places that honors folks as who they are. We need to make sure our bullying and harassment policies are clear and that everyone knows what the plan and protocols are. We need to make sure that all staff understand how to keep our students safe and that it is their job to do so. I will always stand for the young folks in my community. A lot of the work I've done with learners in our community is centered around identity, justice, and activism-- helping educators create brave classrooms where the young folks can be themselves, celebrate who they are and their differences, learn about folks who have fought for justice, and taken action themselves!

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

I think school districts have a responsibility to be a part of the solution and to engage the community in critical thinking and creative problem solving. We

have a responsibility to, not only teach children the truth and provide them with time and space to be big-world problem solvers, but to also give them the opportunities to take action for the issues (like climate change) they are so passionate about.

I've been listening to the young people in our community for years and hearing that one of your biggest concerns is climate change, which is why I am running a zero-waste campaign. I refuse to put campaign waste into the landfills; we've collected old signs from basements and past campaigns and events and are repurposing those into new signs. We're getting creative and having fun.

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

I am a very transparent person and have modeled that throughout my campaign and my career as an educator and author. I can model, for sure and, I can also encourage and support others to be transparent as well. I hope to increase the amount of communication from the school committee to the public. (As it is pretty much nonexistent right now, we can definitely do this!) I also hope to create opportunities for residents in the city to talk with me (beyond public comment) holding open office hours and learning sessions.

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

I believe in transparency and in order for us to have engaging and productive discourse around the budget and the decisions about the budget a few things need to happen- transparency around the budget- members of the Leadership Team and School Committee can work with school councils and offer community sessions where folks can learn about the numbers and ask questions. When our questions don't get answered-- we find our own answers, which are not always accurate and factual. Committee members also need to be asking questions and listening to the answers-- we should be asking teachers and students "What do you need?" and asking the community "What do our schools need in order to be fair and just?" The budget shouldn't just be about keeping the lights on in the buildings. Our city's values are evidenced in the budget and I'd love to be able to show everyone that Northampton deeply values its schools. We need to invest in our schools, because it is how we invest in our futures.

And, while we're always fighting for our "equitable share" of state funding, we also need our city council to honor our schools with the funding they need to

be robust and competitive. This means working with council members so we can all understand the needs of our schools that go beyond just numbers.

**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 will always advocate for increased funding in education. I'll absolutely meet with our state senators and advocate for a more fair share of state monies-- share testimony, and also let our residents know that we cannot solely rely on state funding, which seems to be the talking point for some. We need to engage in supporting our most vulnerable students, recognizing they are whole people rather than a data point.

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

This is what I do-- I even wrote a book, Everything I Learned About Racism I Learned In School because the more knowledge we have about the systemic misuse and abuse of power by those with power and by our institutions, the better equipped we are to fight that. I have a strong support network of nationally recognized educators and authors who are also already doing this work across the country. I will always fight for the protection of our public school systems!

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

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES/ NO**
2. Do you support police-free schools? **YES/ NO**
3. Do you support teaching comprehensive, medically accurate, consent-based, LGBTQ-inclusive sex ed in schools? **YES/ NO**
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/ NO**

**(D) Additional Comments**

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

Not only am I running a zero-waste campaign, I am also only accepting in-kind donations. We are raising no money and spending no money because, already, way too much money has been put into this election. Instead, I'm asking folks to contribute to local student- and family- centered mutual aid, like donating directly to our schools' PTOs.

I am very familiar with book banning as my books often find themselves on the lists and in challenges and I am a member of Authors Against Banned Books and have presented on this topic at national conferences! I will work to protect a students right to read and work to protect their rights in our schools.

I've done this work before-- I am not new to this. I've served on local and national boards centered around education and literacy.

I will be bold and honest.

I will always fight for fair and just schools.

I will always bring the conversation back to the learners.

And, I will always work to usher our schools into the future instead of holding them back in the past.