



City Councilor Survey Responses - Dan Gaynor

1. Do you support the Mayor's "Booster Stabilization Fund"? What are its strengths and what should change?

Our schools not only make Newton one of the most attractive places to raise a family in the country, but also form the fabric of our communities. They teach all of us -- from first-graders to grandparents -- how to be productive citizens. As our teachers, aides, and administrative staff negotiate with the City over their next three-year contract, it's essential to prioritize investment in our schools, particularly by attracting and retaining our talented educators.

While I understand the Mayor's objective in spreading the funds over 8 years to match up with the timeline for paying down our pension liability, our kids can't afford for us to kick the can down the road. Newton's schools have immediate needs stemming from deferred facility maintenance, COVID-induced learning lags, and staff attrition.

I would propose using a greater share of the newly-found funds imminently to rehabilitate school facilities (like new HVAC systems) and fund catch-up tutoring for students with learning loss due to the pandemic. Supporting Newton's educators must be at the core of our long-term strategy as a City, and we cannot allow today's urgent needs to continue to go unaddressed.

2. What do you view as the relationship between new development (housing, commercial) and the schools?

Newton must invest in affordable housing options for the 90% of public employees that do not reside in Newton. How are we supposed to hold onto young, promising educators if they're commuting an hour to work both ways?

Meanwhile, we must fill empty storefronts to grow the City's revenues. It's essential villages like Newtonville include stores like Che! Empanadas, Union Pharmacy, and Mochiko Hawaiian.

These local businesses power the growth of our City's budget, from modernizing infrastructure to increasing educators' salaries. Indeed, commercial properties generate nearly twice the tax revenue of residential properties, allowing us to drive more dollars to our Public Schools.

3. Please share your thoughts on the national teacher shortage, and how it impacts Newton's ability to attract and retain strong educators. Does a city councilor have a role? What is it?

Massachusetts is renowned for having the best public schools in the country, and Newton should be top of the pack. That means our educators deserve the best package possible, because our students deserve nothing less.

Teacher shortages are an urgent dilemma not only for our country, and particularly in Massachusetts. Indeed, according to the Learning Policy Institute, over 56% of Massachusetts schools with teaching vacancies found it very difficult to fill the vacancy or could not fill the vacancy. That's a full 10% higher than the national average.

For us, that trend is no surprise: when 9 out of 10 Newton employees do not live in the City they serve, that indicates our community is unaffordable for our workforce and inaccessible to low-and-middle income residents. We're seeing this dynamic impact NPS at both ends of the seniority spectrum, with tenured teachers retiring and junior teachers leaving for higher-paying jobs. The effect is that there's fewer experienced educators for our kids.

The City Council does have a role to play. We can foster more affordable housing across multiple price points. We can drive more revenue to the City, and in turn, budget it for NPS. We can make it easier to commute to Newton. We can fund more support staff to help teachers focus on pedagogy, not classroom management. We can invest in cutting-edge classrooms. We can revamp HVAC systems to prevent COVID resurgence. And we can, above all, make it easier for the NPS graduates to return to their hometown and teach the next generation.

4. Operating overrides help ensure the health of our schools. What is your plan for and role in ensuring successful overrides?

It's disappointing that the override failed: 75% of the dollars in the latest override proposal were dedicated for our educators, our school buildings, and our 11,700 students.

Projections show an average annual revenue increase of 3.5% over the next 5 years. Meanwhile, the cost of student busing is escalating at 9% annually, trash and recycling at 7%, natural gas and other utilities at 22%, and building and road construction up an unprecedented 30%.

We must have a City Council that transparently conveys the trade-offs associated with an override – like the impact on our schools, our property values, and our City services. We must make the choice simpler, too, by constructing ballot questions that offer clarity in terms of where tax dollars are headed.

5. The current contract offers teachers a COLA of 2% or less. NPS Unit C employees report a non-living wage. Do you believe it is reasonable to expect the NTA to accept the current terms? How can you, as a city councilor, advocate for a fair contract?

No, COLA of 2% is insufficient in a year when the consumer price index rose 3.7%. In other words, inflation is almost twice as expensive as the COLA adjustment. We must ensure our teachers are treated with fairness and dignity.

As a City, we must offer teachers, support staff and administrators competitive benefits and wages, help cover rising healthcare premiums, and hire more support staff to lighten the load in the classroom.

As a hometown kid born and raised here, and as the father of a future Cabot School student, I know Newton's schools are our crown jewel. That's why our City must support its incredible educators.