

**2005 LeftinLowell.com Lowell City Council  
Candidate Questionnaire  
Jackie Doherty**

**1. What do you see as the top three issues that need to be addressed by the next Lowell School Committee? What specifically can you do to address those issues?**

- i. Continued outspoken advocacy in the community about the importance of excellent schools. I have demonstrated my willingness and ability to be a vocal advocate for better schools through speeches before the City Council, letters to the newspaper, and discussions on local radio stations. I will continue to speak out and fight for excellent schools.
- ii. Continued pressure on school administrators to do a better job of meeting the educational needs of all students. My initiatives regarding academic rigor resulted in a flexible-grouping math program for middle school students. During my second term, I plan to expand this pilot to include younger students and to build an increasing emphasis on providing all students with curriculum that challenges them at their levels and better meets their educational needs.
- iii. Behavior issues at all levels affect the quality of learning in the classroom and must be dealt with more effectively along with attendance and dropout rates. During my first term, I pushed several initiatives requiring the school department to report on dropout and attendance at LHS and develop best practices for keeping students in school. In addition, I have focused on discipline issues by requiring the superintendent to report on indicators that schools are making progress in discipline. These initiatives are ongoing and require continued emphasis as we work toward safe, consistent and well attended schools citywide

**2. Should the Lowell School Committee be directly involved in the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements? Why or why not?**

Yes, the school committee should continue to be directly involved. It isn't easy and it is time consuming for the committee, but I don't know of a better way to ensure that the priority is on providing the best education possible to our students. The superintendent is a key advisor on our negotiating team, as is the school committee attorney. The most important change needed in collective bargaining is to eliminate the adversarial tone of negotiations so that we are all working toward common goals.

**3. What is your view on M-CAS requirements for graduation?**

I like the idea of standards and without the graduation requirement, the test wouldn't be taken seriously by students or teachers. That said, we need the resources to help more students succeed. For instance, in 2003 the state cut MCAS remedial funding from \$50 million to \$10 million statewide. Even without the funding, my initiatives regarding the use of data to identify struggling students and the district's areas of weakness regarding instruction have helped enable the schools to make more effective use of the resources we do have.

**4. Is Lowell prepared to meet the new requirements of the addition of science M-CAS that will take effect in 2010? If not what do you propose to see that students are proficient in science?**

In one sense, Lowell is better prepared in science than we were a few years ago in that during my term we upgraded the science labs at LHS. On the other hand, since the deep cuts in funding in 2003 (the budget crisis that initially prompted me to run for school committee), science teachers were reduced to half time at the elementary schools. We need to put more resources toward science education, but it must be done in a thoughtful way due to limited funds. Currently, the school department is preparing a report on the status of science education in the district so that we can address this issue more fully and focus available resources effectively.

**5. What specific proposals will you make to improve the percentage of students in Lowell that are proficient in the other M-CAS requirements?**

As I continue to focus on improving attendance, insisting on respectful behavior at all schools, and demanding higher academic standards that challenge all students, test scores will improve.

**6. Are the alternative schools for students with discipline problems working in Lowell? If not what should be changed?**

The alternative schools are working in that they provide students with smaller class settings that focus on the areas and issues they are struggling with. For example, the district tested a group of students who had been at an alternative school for three months and found their academic skills had improved more than a year's worth. The programs, however, are not working as well as they should in terms of transitioning students back to the mainstream classrooms, which is an area we have begun to address. (At LHS we now have staff responsible for overseeing a student's transition out of the alternative program.) The enrollment limitations in the alternative programs are also too small to meet the needs of the many troubled students we have at all grade levels. We need to expand the middle and elementary programs in particular.

**7. What kinds of security measures are needed in Lowell schools to protect students and teachers?**

During my term on the committee, many improvements have been made regarding security. For instance, we now have a system where all school doors are locked. Visitors must be buzzed in and immediately check with the office before entering a school. During this last budget cycle, we also added a security officer and upgraded some equipment at the high school. Additional improvements needed include more security staff at the high school, more cameras and better monitoring of them, and increased technical supports. The high school also needs more crisis counselors (currently has one) and social workers (currently has three) for its nearly 4,000 students, which is an unmanageable caseload. Should we ever have a large increase in funding for security, my wish list would also include adult monitors and/or cameras on all buses, and security staff and monitored cameras at all middle schools.

**8. Do you support the teaching of Intelligent Design (creationist theory) alongside evolution in science classes? Do you think it should be taught instead of evolution?**

I do not think creationist theory should be taught in public schools. I also prefer that evolution is taught in a way that focuses on the scientific evidence supporting it without discrediting some people's beliefs in a higher being.

**9. Do you support/oppose the search of student lockers or backpacks for contraband? Why/Why not?**

I support the potential of a search of student lockers and backpacks as a random occurrence that could happen at any time because I see it as a deterrent.

**10. What do you propose to improve working relations between the Lowell School Department and Lowell City Hall?**

Better communication and awareness of the importance of excellent schools will continue to improve the relationship between the schools and city hall. My outspoken advocacy and willingness to take the school story to the public has increased city leaders' awareness of education issues.

**11. Is the cost of the Lowell School Administration adequate, too high or too low? Why?**

Lowell School administrators are adequately paid. When the committee was reviewing administrative salaries with the superintendent last winter, I researched this issue with the Mass. Association of School Committees. I discovered that with the increases the superintendent proposed, Lowell school administrators would be paid competitively with other similar-size districts as well as nearby school systems which compete for talented staff but do not have the diverse and challenging student population Lowell does. (I was instrumental in getting performance-based pay incentives included in the new contracts for the superintendent, central office staff, and principals.) Another thing I learned from my research was that we tend to be thinly staff administratively. For instance, LHS is the second largest high school in the state, yet our sister school in size, Brockton (the largest high school), has many more administrators and counselors. With competitive and generous salaries, of course, comes accountability, and I hold our school leaders accountable for providing an excellent education to all our children. We are not there yet but we are headed in the right direction!