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## **Two Page Campaign Statement for the Shutesbury School Committee Special Election: Dec 6, 2005**

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### **My Work on the School Committee**

I was elected to the School Committee three years ago. I had never run for any political office before. I have no great interest in being a politician or in spending nights at meetings, however we moved to Shutesbury because of the school system and three years ago I saw our school in crisis. The educational values I hold dear were being crushed by State mandates and a superintendent woefully mismatched to our district.

While on the Committee I have served on the search committee that hired the interim superintendents after David Crisafuli, our previous superintendent, resigned. After this I also served on the search committee that hired Linda Driscoll, our current Superintendent. I am the secretary of the Union #28 School Committee as well as the Shutesbury representative to the Union #28 Budget and Personnel Committee. In addition, I have taken vacation days from work to attend workshops and conferences sponsored by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.

Besides helping to hire Linda Driscoll, the most important work I have done on the School Committee has involved the Ad-Hoc Mission Statement Committee. This committee brought together members from the School Committee, School Council, and SES staff who met with administrators, parents and community members to draft a mission statement. From these meetings we created a set of guiding values for the school. I am very proud of this work.

### **About Myself**

I live here with my wife, Dina, and our three daughters, Grace (13), Rebecca (9) and Eliza (6). Like many Shutesbury families, the elementary school plays a big role in our life. I work at Concord Consortium as the Director of Technology and have more than 20 years of experience developing innovative educational technology and curriculum, managing projects, hiring people, and maintaining budgets. The Concord Consortium is a non-profit educational research and development organization with about 50 employees that specializes in developing and adapting technology for K-12 math and science education and teacher-professional development.

Our family moved here from Montague in 1997 because we wanted our kids to have an excellent elementary school experience. I had been hearing from educators across the State for over 10 years about the amazing project-oriented work students at the school had been doing with Ron Berger. This is the kind of education I wanted for my own children.

### **Educational Philosophy**

It is my experience that children learn best when they take an active and engaged ownership in their own learning and use this involvement to construct an understanding of themselves and the world around them. Our school must do the best job possible to prepare our children to lead successful lives of personal and social meaning. I believe this is best achieved with a curriculum that emphasizes thematic and project-based learning along with a rich mixture of assessments. The learning strategies and essential skills described in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks are learned most effectively when children use these skills in projects they have a personal investment in. This means more than a narrow focus on high-stakes tests and State curriculum frameworks, it means making certain that students are involved with their hearts and their minds in projects that are meaningful to them. It is important for the School Committee to defend this

educational philosophy and approach against a general theme in education today that values a broad but shallow mastery of facts.

### **Important Work Left To Do**

The most important work the School Committee can do now is to use the Mission Statement to evaluate whether or not the school is meeting the community's core educational values. We can use this statement to help create a strategic plan with goals, objectives, and methods of assessment to institutionalize these values and promote a culture of excellence. Without leadership by the School Committee, School Council, and School administration these values will wither in our actual practice because of the natural administrative focus on State and Federal mandates. Both the State and National governments back up their partially-unfunded mandates with the threat of punitive measures and the most important measure they use to threaten schools are the results of MCAS tests. These State and Federal policies are designed to provoke an administrative response and they get one. Unfortunately the response by many school systems is to teach to the test or worse. Some school systems even encourage poorly performing students to invisibly drop out so that their performance won't lower the school averages.

I think our Mission is an amazingly deep and well-crafted document. For example consider just three of the guiding value from the Mission: "We value the development of thinking skills, because we want our children to be wise decision-makers and capable problem-solvers." The State Curriculum Frameworks cover many important thinking skills but they say nothing about developing wisdom or problem-solving skills. If we take this value seriously we need a curriculum that puts students in situations where they have the ability to make decisions that matter to them and include them as partners in our work to solve problems. This kind of curriculum does not come from a textbook, it can only come from school leadership and teachers that both share this value and plan accordingly.

Here's another example: "We value child-centered teaching practices, because we want our children engaged in work that is significant to them and at which they can succeed." Again, there is nothing in this value that contradicts goals set in the Frameworks but this value should guide our approach. What underlies this value is our belief that children learn more doing work that is significant to them.

And from the mission on assessment: "We value meaningful and varied assessments, because when our children demonstrate an understanding of their work and reflect on their progress, they become more effective learners." Not only does this state that we believe in using many types of assessments but it puts the kids right in the loop and defines the best assessments as ones they can use to reflect on their progress.

It is the school community's and the School Committee's job to create policies and expectations for our school leadership to create a school environment where these values flourish.

### **Contacting Me**

If you would like to share your ideas and concerns about Shutesbury Elementary School, I invite you to call (259-9125), write (106 Sand Hill Road) or email me (stephen@deanbrook.org). I have also created an open community web discussion forum at <http://blog.deanbrook.org/>

For more detailed information on my views on assessment, special education, class-size, early reading, transition to the middle school, teacher professional development, state aid and school budgets, the state curriculum frameworks, MCAS testing, and the Mission statement please read my even longer campaign statement <http://www.deanbrook.org/campaign-dec-05.html>.

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Stephen Bannasch

106 Sand Hill Road, Shutesbury, MA 01072

413 259 9125

[stephen@deanbrook.org](mailto:stephen@deanbrook.org)

<http://www.deanbrook.org>