

2024 Survey of Mayoral Candidates for Members of the Burlington Education Association

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1. Will you vote FOR the FY2025 School Budget?

YES

2. Burlington School District has not been able to fill vacant positions. School psychologist, special educator, and paraeducator positions remain unfilled. In addition, the district will continue to use attrition to further reduce the teaching force. This diminishes students' abilities to access their education. How does it diminish the City of Burlington?

When our schools are not supported, our community is not supported. A lack of investment in our schools, including unfilled positions, represents a lack of investment in the future of our city.

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When my daughter first entered Kindergarten I realized that, for the first time, I had real access to parenting help that I desperately needed. I went to the school guidance councilor literally in tears. It was the first time I

This diminishes our city by hindering our educators' ability to do their jobs and support our children. It also directly harms our children: when key positions like special educator are unfilled, it is both an equity and a disability justice issue.

Right now, our children need well-resourced, fully staffed schools more than ever due to the impacts of the pandemic and several other economic system failures impacting families - housing, opioid and mental health crises. This is how we build a thriving city where children grow up healthy and fulfilled. It is how we prevent and deter harm. We must work quickly and creatively to build a robust teaching force and fill positions.

ever had the parenting help that I needed and I recognize I am a more privileged parent than most. Our community needs more mental health care workers and social supports, and the schools seem to me, a very accessible and affordable way to deliver the service.

In addition, the supports of Special Educators and para-educators serve not only the individual needs of particular students, they support everyone in the classroom, and the families. They're essential to a positive and productive learning environment in our schools, which contributes to our community health and workforce development. Healthy schools and children, mean healthy families and community. When people's needs are meant, we need to give attention to solutions. Any further loss of these positions will be a detriment to our schools, families, and our community.

3. What is your attitude toward labor unions in general? How will you work with organized labor to improve working conditions for the city's employees?

I have been a proud and active union supporter my entire adult life and spent most of my professional career working as a labor organizer. Labor unions are a critical part of a vibrant economy. They help lift wages and improve working conditions for all workers.

I spent over a decade as a statewide labor organizer at Vermont-NEA supporting teachers and support staff across the state to improve their working and advocate for strong public schools. As many of you will recall, I worked closely with the Burlington Education Association over those years, building BEA's leadership capacity and membership strength to take collective action.

3. What is your attitude toward labor unions in general? How will you work with organized labor to improve working conditions for the city's employees?

I have had many strong personal and professional relationships with union members. They are a valuable source of insight in crafting policy positions for my campaign, and I'm proud to have the endorsements of the union members of the four City Unions. I value our workers and understand they are the heartbeat of our City. Assuring a safe, fair, and fulfilling work environment, where workers are heard and have the ear of myself and my administration, as Mayor have been central themes of my campaign. "All Hands On Deck" (our campaign slogan) is not a top down leadership concept but rather a recognition that it will take the contributions of all of us to navigate the rough waters we're in. I am fully

We worked together to organize a successful multi-day teachers' strike in 2017 and a successful ESP contract campaign in 2018. I went on to start my own business in 2018 and continued to work with labor unions, including writing a national strike organizing manual for the NEA and building a statewide ESP livable wage campaign for NEARI (Rhode Island NEA). Earlier in my career, I directed the Vermont Livable Wage Campaign and successfully advocated for the passage of a permanent cost-of-living adjustment to the state minimum wage.

In my capacity as a state legislator, I have arguably introduced the most labor bills in my two terms compared to any other legislator. Most recently, I introduced H.219 (Vermont PRO Act) which simplified the union organizing process for public sector unions (including ESPs and teachers), bans captive audience meetings, and allows domestic and agricultural workers to organize unions. This legislation will likely pass this session within a companion Senate bill. I also introduced bills to modernize our equal pay law to include gender and racial identity, require employers to post wage information, and modernize our unemployment and workers' compensation laws. Several of these bills have passed in the last year.

I will continue to collaborate with organized labor as mayor. This means listening to the concerns of workers and bringing management of local employers to the table for any discussions relevant to the union or its members. It means ensuring that employers, from the City to large institutions, adhere to hard-earned collective bargaining agreements and respect the right to organize. It also means prioritizing the issues that unions have already identified as needs in Burlington: livable wages, healthcare, under-resourced departments, access to affordable housing, and more.

committed to working with our union employees to better understand the needs of our City and the workers who are delivering essential services to our City. I've received these endorsements because I make a habit of not just checking in with department heads, but also with the unions and workers, in making important policy decisions.

On a local level, the city can leverage its role as a major employer and its contracted work to establish professional wages, benefits, and strong labor practices. I will set a pro-worker and pro-union tone from the Mayor's Office and make the city a model employer.

4. Given the diversity of our fair city, what policies or initiatives will you support and/or put forth that will promote equity and improve collaboration between all stakeholders?

A vibrant Burlington is a place where everyone thrives, no matter their identity. Our community is becoming more diverse: 37% of our high and middle school students identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) and 36% identify as LGBTQ+. We must ensure our young people, and all marginalized people, are affirmed and supported in our community.

We create an inclusive community by prioritizing belonging and equity throughout the city's functions as it serves residents and visitors, acts as an employer, and influences other public and private employers in our area. This work must be done consciously and consistently as a city to create a truly safe and inclusive community. The city plays an important leadership and convener role among stakeholders to address harm when it happens and, more importantly, proactively work to interrupt harm. This includes prioritizing bias and cultural competency training within city departments, especially the police department. It also includes naming and understanding the impact current policies and practices have on marginalized folks, including folks living with disabilities, BIPOC folks, and LGBTQ+ folks. I've worked over the last couple of years to remove and address repeated transphobic stickers put up along North Avenue and outside schools and

4. Given the diversity of our fair city, what policies or initiatives will you support and/or put forth that will promote equity and improve collaboration between all stakeholders?

Promoting equity requires reaching out to diverse stakeholders and including more people and perspectives in our processes. It also requires us to assure our hiring practices are inclusive and attract diverse candidates to our applicant pool, which is the first step in bringing in a diverse workforce. The City needs to continue work on making sure our workplace is culturally inclusive and that we break down the systems that have fostered racism and exclusion.

parks. The city has failed to adequately hold the people responsible for these hateful stickers accountable and failed to prioritize repairing the harm to the trans community. This is an example of where the city could dramatically improve to make our city more inclusive and safe for everyone.

As mayor, I will utilize the city's Racial Equity Inclusion and Belonging Office (REIB) to support policy development, employment practices, and support for the community. I have sought and will continue to seek counsel from marginalized communities to inform the city's work and priorities. I will partner with multilingual communities and organizations to improve and invest in language access, including in our schools for both children and their families. I will appoint department heads with proven experience creating a culture of inclusion and a commitment to addressing bias and harm in the workplace.

5. Teachers cannot afford to live where we work. What are you going to do about that?

Everyone, including our teachers, education support professionals (ESPs), and all workers, should be able to live and work in Burlington. People deserve policies that support access to livable wages, affordable housing and transportation, high-quality child care, and health insurance.

Affordability is a multifaceted issue: our cost of living competes with expensive urban areas across the country, while our median income is much lower. Unions are a key part of helping to lift wages, but they need willing partners in managers to invest in wages in equitable ways that do not create wage compression. The city can also do more to work with employers in the area to encourage more "community benefits" partnerships such as coordinating a

5. Teachers cannot afford to live where we work. What are you going to do about that?

We need to build more housing! As someone who has actually found homes for teachers to buy and worked directly with teachers priced out of the market I know first hand the full impacts of our housing shortage specifically on teachers. There are a variety of factors contributing to this at an increasing rate in the last 4 years: more out of state buyers consuming our workforce housing, increasing prices, rapidly escalating interest rates, housing development suppressed by - regulation, legal challenges, cost of labor and materials, (ironically) lack of housing for trade workers. We need to eliminate redundant regulation, reconsider appeal processes for development projects, and encourage more local young people to pursue careers in the trades. As a City Councilor I have

stronger public transportation system that is free/affordable and creating more child care centers (UVM closed their center around 4 years ago).

As mayor, I will do everything in my power to build an affordable Burlington. I will promote livable wages for all, including enforcing the city's livable wage ordinance. I will support building more housing that includes affordable housing for all income levels (low and moderate). This can be achieved by allowing denser zoning, strengthening our inclusionary zoning ordinance to incentivize developers to actually build more affordable units rather than paying a fee to the city, and strengthening our vacant buildings ordinance to bring housing stock back online. I will also support affordability for residents by creating a sustainable, income-sensitized local property tax to mirror the state education property tax system and exploring rent stabilization policies that include incentivizing property owners to keep rent increases low and advancing the process to finally create a just cause eviction ordinance.

worked on moving forward new zoning in the South End that will allow up to 1000 housing units in a former parking lot, supported infill development in all our neighborhoods, made it easier to build Accessory Dwelling Units, fought against conversion of housing units to AirBnBs, and am currently working on eliminating the impediments to building condominiums and converting rentals to owner occupied condos. All of these initiatives will increase our supply of housing and provide more homeownership and rental opportunities for teachers and similarly compensated workers throughout our City.

6. Put your stump speech aside. Imagine for a moment you have to teach a group of first graders. They want to know why they are accosted by drug addicts on the bus, at the bus stop, on walking field trips, on the bike path, in the public library, and walking home. Explain to this class of curious children why their teachers and parents are afraid for them. Then explain what you, as our mayor, are going to do about it.

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Everyone should be safe in Burlington - you, me, and everyone who lives in and visits our city. There are many people who are suffering in Burlington right now either because they do not have a place to live, they are suffering from an illness, and/or their job does not pay enough for them to buy the food, clothes, and medicine they need.

We have many people in our community whose needs are not being met. Just like in our classroom when a friend's needs are not being met, they act in ways that can hurt others. We need to meet their needs better. They are trying to meet their needs by using drugs that are very dangerous. Sometimes when they're using

When someone cannot get what they need to be healthy, they sometimes do not make good choices, and when they need help, they don't always express that well. It is also very frustrating and hard to not have a home and struggle with an illness that is very hard to cure. These folks are our neighbors. They need our compassion.

It is also likely that you have not seen people who don't have homes or are suffering from a serious illness before. That can be scary and sad to see. I am not scared when I see these neighbors. I am worried about them and want to help.

Remember, not everyone who is living without a home or struggling with an illness that you may see is dangerous. However, a few people in our community are behaving in unsafe or harmful ways and they need to take responsibility for their behavior. It's never okay for anyone to threaten you or make you unsafe. You should always be and feel safe in our city. Be cautious in a new situation and listen to the adults around you. And keep in mind that most times, we are just in the same space as someone who is having a very, very hard time. When we see our neighbors in pain, it can be very scary, but they are still part of our community. We have social workers in the city who are smart people who know how to support these people when they are having a hard time and, when necessary, we can and should call the police to help if there is a serious safety issue.

Your parents and teachers are also going through this with you. For many of us, it is our first time seeing so many people struggling so publicly. Because your parents and teachers love you so much, they want you to be safe. They

drugs they leave drugs around and the drugs can hurt you. Please don't touch them. They also leave needles around and they can poke you. Please don't pick them up. And the people themselves can't think well and might harm someone, even you, when they are taking drugs because it affects their brains.

Until we get them the help that they need we need to keep you and them safe. We need to offer people help, but we can't let our friends harm others. When you don't do what you're supposed to, we try to meet your needs and help you feel better. But we don't let you continue to disrupt the classroom. We need to do the same for the people outside of school. As Mayor, I am going to ask people the police, who are here to keep us safe, to remove people who are using drugs on our streets and harming our friends. I want them to get the help they need, but they can't get that if we just let them continue making bad choices and harming others. They need our help. We need to offer them more help, but when they choose not to accept our help, we won't be allowing them to put you at risk while we try to get them the help that they need. I want you, and your teachers, and all of us to be safe at school, in our parks, and in our homes.

want to make sure that you are able to move around our city without fear or danger. Being afraid for your safety is another way for them to show their love.

When we see people who are having a hard time, the best response is to help. The best way we can make sure you are safe is by making sure that we are taking care of our neighbors. When we do that, we help them change their behavior, so that you are no longer in situations that feel or are unsafe.

We can help people who use drugs by connecting them to treatment from medical professionals and by making sure they are able to take care of themselves. That means they need a safe place to go home to, nourishing food, clean clothes, and support from their community, just like you and I do. We can also help them by holding them accountable if they act in ways that create a real threat or harm to the people around them. We can help point them in the right direction and give them ways to fix that harm, just like if you fight with your siblings or break rules at school.

As mayor, my job is to bring together all the smartest people in the room to discuss how we can make these solutions happen, create plans based on those ideas, and then organize our city so that those ideas happen quickly and effectively.

I know it is often scary to see or experience these things in our neighborhood. By remembering that these people are our neighbors, we can help them, and so help all of us be safer, happier, and healthier.

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problem. We are continually attacked and applauded, attacked and applauded. How will you uplift our profession and promote trust in Burlington educators?

Our community must be united behind our schools and their professionals. Schools serve a vital role in nurturing, educating, and supporting our children. Teachers and support staff must be seen as part of the solution. I spent over a decade of my career continually advocating for educators in communities across the state to do exactly this: uplifting the profession by helping the community understand the critical role educators play and the realities of how difficult the profession has become. Towards the end of my role at Vermont-NEA, I was one of the first labor organizers in the country to advance the concept of “common good bargaining” which connects the well-being of educators, students, families and community together. This is a concept that goes well beyond wages, benefits, and working conditions. Instead, it builds connection between schools, professionals, and the community about the needs and well being of the larger community for which educators play a central role.

As a leader in Burlington, I will support our educators by acting as a real ally. Being an ally means calling out harm, such as attacks against educators, when it happens and working with the impacted party to support them in ways they deem appropriate. It also means serving as a model for unifying leadership. We must reverse the divisiveness coming from City Hall; actively disrupt narratives in our community that diminish trust in our education system; and send a clear message of support from the Mayor’s Office for all aspects of our school system, from our superintendent and school budget, to our educators.

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As someone who struggled mightily as the mother of an only child, I can tell you I think that you are all heroes. I tried to get her to put on shoes and walk to school. We were late to school most days despite my best effort. That you can get an entire classroom to do mostly what they are asked is an extraordinary feat in my opinion. Parents are "in" your classroom in new ways since Covid. You seemed to be judged in how you do your job non-stop. You are constantly under a microscope. I will uplift you by singing your praises and asking people to remember the struggles we have as parents and that you rise to this challenge everyday, addressing diverse needs of the entire classroom and it is a daunting job. Thank you all for doing it and building our future in your classrooms.