

Opening statement for PANGEA by candidate Patty Nolan:

Below are my answers to the questions. I want to start by thanking PANGEA for existing, and thanking the individual members for their unbelievably important dedication and work on behalf of a strong world language program in Cambridge. Although the elected School Committee represents you, we cannot accomplish our common goals without parent support. I have found that my successes come from working with the community – engaged and involved parents – and collaborating with my colleagues on School Committee.

I have been the strongest and most vocal supporter of immersion programs in Cambridge during my tenure on School Committee. That dedication comes from four sources:

- My knowledge and understanding of the educational research on immersion programs which demonstrate clearly their potential for improving achievement for all students
- My analysis and review of the results of our immersion programs, which shows that immersion has led to high achievement by students in the programs – including low income students and Latinos (for Amigos). While the programs need improvements, notably greater rigor and explicit language acquisition goals, the fact that the programs have had success yet have not been fully supported by the district leads me to work to increase support based on educational need
- My steadfast and strong belief that our students need to compete in a global economy and having a second language is a key competitive advantage. I have adopted as a mantra (from Gregg Roberts of Utah): “Monolingualism is the illiteracy of the 21st century.”
- My personal firsthand knowledge of immersion gives me a solid sense of immersion as a life changing positive experience. I am the only candidate who has been an immersion parent (both my children were at Amigos for six years) and an exchange student who lived with a French-speaking family for a year in an immersive environment, an experience that changed my life.

That dedication has led to my advocacy over the years on behalf of immersion and world language – support that does not ebb and flow with politics. Even at a personal political cost to me, I have sponsored motions to support immersion programs because it is the right thing to do for students and the district. I have taken votes that cost me political support. I will continue to do that, since I have pledged to do what is right by educational best practice.

My work has also gone above and beyond. When presented with information I am the SC member known for verifying the information, with an eye towards ensuring that we are getting the full picture. When we are not, I bring forward information to better inform our policy decisions.

One final note: I am an incumbent – which does not mean I will automatically be re-elected. I needed #2 votes last time to win and the time before I won by 19 votes. To keep a strong voice of reason on the School Committee, please vote #1 for me on Nov. 5. To volunteer to help, please call or email me or sign up - www.pattynolan.org/contact.html

Vision for Language Education/Immersion

1. What do you think CPS can provide to its students/graduates to succeed in a globalized economy?

To provide our students with an education to prepare them for success in a globalized economy requires many elements. Students need solid skills in the core academics of math, literacy, science and social studies. Students need at least one language in addition to English. Another set of skills that is increasingly valued and important include critical thinking, collaboration, the ability to work with a diverse range of people, teamwork, creativity, innovation and perseverance.

Those broad educational goals seem daunting, yet we need to recognize that students need breadth and depth in their education. World language is a key element of what it takes to succeed in the global economy and our society.

2. What is your vision on the world language programs at CPS?

My vision is a high quality program starting in Kindergarten, (or Junior Kindergarten for those in JK) and going through high school. My vision is for several languages to be offered, and more opportunities for bilingual immersion programs.

3. What is your vision for how your foreign language goals would be implemented?

Implementing these foreign language goals involves collaboration among the community, staff, administration, and School Committee. I believe that we cannot wait to implement a strong quality world language program. I advocated for this goal last year, and voted to include world language in the schools for this school year. When that vote failed to get majority support, I successfully pushed for a report back on an implementation plan for world language this fall so we could implement next fall. If re-elected, continuing to push for world language to be developed and implemented is one of my top priorities, and pledges.

4. What are your goals for foreign language learning options in elementary school? In secondary school?

My goals for language options in elementary schools is a quality program where students can learn a second language with increasing proficiency such that they enter high school with a minimum of intermediate language skills.

For high school, the goal is for advanced language skills in at least one other language. As with many areas, high expectations is key our district should lead, and that means setting students up for success by expecting that they can learn one, two or three other languages. In much of the developed world, that is the norm.

5. What languages do you consider to be the most important for students to learn in the 21st century?

Every student should know at least two languages. For me, it is less about which language a student picks than the idea that they know at least one other language. If the other language is not in the top of usage around the world, then a third language makes sense. In this country, obviously, English is the most important language to learn. After English, the languages most important are Spanish, French, Chinese, Portuguese. That list is based on what Utah, a national leader in immersion programs, sees as the highest priority languages for US residents. Based on world prevalence, one would add Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, Russian and German. More people in the world speak Hindi than French, yet French is the second language for much of Africa, making it a diplomatic language that increases the usefulness of understanding French. IN Cambridge, one would add Amharic as an important language due to the relatively large number of our residents, mostly immigrants who speak it.

6. How important is an immersion foreign language option in elementary schools compared to foreign language exposure?

Immersion is a proven model for learning a language and in my view is a critically important part of our options as a district. I believe we should explore having the entire district be immersion. My understanding of this issue is personal. I was an exchange student after high school, with an immersion experience living with a French-speaking family. Although I had studied French, I was not fluent. I saw firsthand the power of being in an immersive environment. My knowledge of French was important – and with that school knowledge combined with an immersion experience I gained fluency quickly. Other students with me who had not studied French in school did not pick up as quickly as I did. However, they learned much faster than I had, and by the end of our year were very close to fluent. That experience taught me firsthand that when you have high expectations, when you see the need to learn another language (you need to communicate) and there is immersion, that people are successful in learning a language.

World language exposure is better than none. However, immersion provides an opportunity to become fluent, in reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking. As exchange students, my peers and I discussed how we felt we were really there when we started dreaming and thinking in the second language. That happens with an immersive educational environment.

7. Will you support expanding the current immersion elementary schools and/or creating new ones to accommodate additional demand from families?

Yes. Unequivocally. I am the strongest supporter of immersion programs now on School Committee. I have a long track record of supporting Amigos, Ola and the Chinese Immersion program. Honestly, many people in the community have wondered if I am biased because of my strong support. They assume that since my own two children went to Amigos for six years I am just doing it for that reason. They have it wrong – I picked

Amigos because we wanted to give our kids the gift of second language fluency. And I continue to advocate strongly because I believe in immersion.

More importantly, I support the immersion programs because they work from an education and global awareness perspective. They are a proven way to increase achievement, can close the achievement gap, have benefits beyond the second language – increasing achievement in English, math, and other subjects.

I have said frequently that we should support the current programs we have more. The district has not supported them. I advocated with the parent group to have a point person for bilingual immersion, and that happened this year.

I have publicly stated that I believe we should explore starting a French immersion program at one of our schools, to address the demand for immersion.

8. I have friends with children in immersion schools in NY and CA and they are very well planned out for K-12. I would like to know if any of the candidates are in favor of strong, cohesive immersion programs that will span K-12. For Amigos? For King Chinese Immersion? For Ola/Portuguese Immersion?

Yes, I am in favor of exactly that approach. AS the School Committee member who sponsored the motion for the district to join the national consortium on immersion programs coordinated by the Utah Department of Education, I have advocated for a more comprehensive approach. I was gratified that my motion passed and was adopted. Cambridge is now part of the consortium, which I believe will help us enormously in this area. We will be able to build on best practice.

Recruitment

9. Recruitment of students from the "free lunch" demographic to Cambridge's immersion programs has been very disappointing in recent years, what can the District do to improve this performance?

The district should have fully supported the efforts of the school communities to address this question. I sponsored a motion, which was approved, for any school that is out of balance by socio-economic, to get money – several thousand dollars each – to help with recruitment. The motion passed, yet inexplicably principals did not access that money.

The efforts at both the King CI program and Amigos and Ola were successful – despite parents being on their own essentially, with no district support. That is unacceptable. We cannot insist on balance and not help schools address it.

Now that I know the parents were not able to access the funding we voted, I will ensure that this year the funding is available and used.

The district can and should reach out to all families with the research on how immersion can close the achievement gap and prepare students for better jobs. The district does help other programs be marketed. There is no reason not to help the immersion programs.

10. The recent adjustments to the controlled choice system are strangling the Cambridge immersion programs. Please explain how these adjustments support the immersion programs.

The adjustments do not have to strangle the immersion programs. If the district fully supported immersion, including making sure that low income families understood the benefits of immersion, it would make the immersion programs stronger.

However, I believe we as a district need to monitor the policy, make sure support is being given, and if the immersion programs are being hurt by the policy, we need to change the policy, since strong quality immersion programs are essential to my vision of a strong school district.

11. How do you believe the controlled choice adjustments can be changed to adequately support and ensure the survival of Cambridge's immersion programs?

I believe that we should allow empty seats to be filled after second grade in any school with a wait list regardless of SES.

I also believe that we should open up seats in the upper grades to students who don't speak the language, since having empty seats is not healthy for a school.

We also need to understand why there has been attrition in the immersion programs. Until we understand it, we won't be able to effectively address it. If it is because some students – for example special education students – need additional support, then we need to provide that within the school. Once we study it, we should develop a plan to address it, since that hurts the immersion programs.

And an idea to explore is to increase the number of Kindergartens and first and second grades, to counter the attrition that happens in the upper grades.

Language Best Practices

12. The research on language immersion best practices consistently supports at least 6 years of continuous immersion learning for at least 50% of the learning time. Why is Cambridge pursuing a different strategy with the Portuguese and Chinese immersion programs? What research supports Cambridge's approach of providing foreign language instruction for less than 50% of the learning time in the upper elementary grades?

The research is clear and Cambridge's approach is mixed. I believe that the district has not been following its own policies. The Innovation Agenda said Ola was a K-8 program, yet it is not operating that way. The proposal to start the King CI program specifically referenced building on best practice of at least 50% for at least six years, yet the program was questioned and that almost changed. Only due to parent advocacy and several of us on School Committee who got involved was the CI program put back on track with best practice.

I believe Cambridge should explore a model of more than 50% in the target language during the K-2 years. I also believe we should provide for continuation through at least 8th grade. I fought successfully for Amigos to continue as a program through 8th grade – regardless of whether it was in its own building – due to educational concerns. The same concerns should apply to all immersion programs.

13. Given that only children born September - March are eligible for Junior Kindergarten, children born April - August who enter a language immersion program in Kindergarten (instead of JK) miss an entire year of language learning. What should happen to address this language-learning gap for the JK-ineligible kids?

A high priority of mine is to address the early education gap by ensuring that all four year olds in Cambridge have access to quality pre-K/JK programs. That will ensure that the disparity and language gap won't happen. There will still be the issue of students entering Cambridge Public Schools after K. I believe we should have supports in place for intensive help for students wanting immersion to catch up, so they can enter those programs if there is space.

14. What do you believe are the some of the challenges that immersion programs face in Cambridge?

- The biggest challenge is that many people don't understand and don't fully support the program. As the only candidate for School Committee who has been an immersion parent, I bring a unique and important perspective to all discussions of immersion. And, as the only candidate who experienced immersion myself, as an exchange student, I bring that perspective also.
- Many families do not understand the benefits of immersion or think it is too difficult, or if their child already speaks the second language (Spanish, Chinese or Portuguese), they don't realize that being in immersion helps with English, not hurts.
- Another challenge is attrition in the programs – students leave the programs over the years. Per my answer above, we need to know why students leave so we can address it.

15. What kind of dual language model training do teachers receive? Who else should be trained? Do the teachers and staff at all three immersion programs receive the same training? Is the training adequate?

Teachers do not receive enough training. Now that there is a point person for bilingual immersion, and we are part of the national consortium, Cambridge can and should learn from best practice, which includes more training specific to immersion.

All staff in a school should be trained. And immersion programs should be hiring bilingual staff at every level for every position whenever possible. Priority should be given to staff – cafeteria, custodians, specialists, as well as administrative and teaching staff.

16. What will you do to follow best practices and to support the existing bilingual immersion programs in Cambridge? Please be specific.

I have a long track record of supporting best practices and the existing programs. I have been the strongest and most active member of School Committee on immersion issues. I have worked with my colleagues to help them understand the importance of immersion - from an educational and social-cultural point of view.

Best practice is for immersion programs to be fully supported, and to have at least 50% instruction in every subject, including art, music, PE, and technology. Also, best practice is for all staff to be bilingual.

Specifically: I successfully argued for Amigos and Ola to enroll more students with a language background. During the Innovation Agenda discussion, I listened and argued for best practice for the immersion programs to be in the same building, (not necessarily a separate building as happened with Amigos due to the superintendent's recommendation). I consistently have pushed for support for immersion programs to recruit a diverse range of students, including sponsoring a motion to give schools more funding. I have amended many policies and motions passed to ensure that immersion programs were included. I advocated strongly for the district to follow the policy passed for the CI program – which was to have a program in the school, through grade 8 when the school was K-8 and grade 5 when the school became K-5. I brought in Gregg Roberts from Utah for a curriculum subcommittee (which I chair) to talk about best practices in immersion. As a result of that meeting, many people understand how important it is to fully support immersion programs. One critically important outcome from that meeting was to counter many of the myths about immersion. Specifically, Mr. Roberts pointed out that immersion programs are not more expensive, that they can be balanced, that immersion and non-immersion strands can co-exist peacefully in a school and that immersion works educationally for all students.

I will continue my advocacy and strong support – because it is the right thing to do. For all students and for all of Cambridge. Specifically, I will monitor what happens with the additional support promised to immersion programs, will ensure that educational best practice is followed with the program design – since that is a School Committee policy decision.

Resources

17. Given that the language immersion programs are growing in popularity and better equip students to succeed in an increasingly global world, can additional dedicated administrative staff at the CPS District level be hired?
18. Can a dual language coordinator be recruited from one of the existing, more established programs? Can the World Languages Coordinator oversee the immersion programs without muddying the water?

The issue with Cambridge and immersion programs and world language is not a lack of total resources. It is a lack of management focus and support. We have the resources – we need to use our resources more effectively and strongly in support of immersion programs.

I advocated strongly for someone to oversee the immersion programs and fully supported the proposal put forth by parents to have some be identified. I then worked with the superintendent to ensure that someone was identified. I believe having Mr. Kelliher be the coordinator makes sense. Furthermore, he will be better able to understand the range of offerings and see how immersion programs fit into the district. It is essential for the immersion programs to be viewed as part of the district, not set apart, which might happen with a coordinator not tied directly to top management.

Because of this new point person, at this point, I don't support a new administrator to oversee the immersion programs. One issue in Cambridge is that we don't coordinate what we already do. And, we are still a top-heavy district with administrators, given our size.

However, if our immersion programs continue to grow then I believe that we should look to best practice and other districts with successful immersion programs and model our structure on theirs, which might include a separate immersion coordinator position.

19. In an immersion program, how much support, in foreign language instruction, do you think should be provided to struggling learners or children with special needs?

Immersion programs should provide support to struggling learners, and special needs students. For some students, immersion might not be the right educational fit, yet for other struggling learners or special needs students, immersion can provide a positive educational experience for students which allows them to be successful overall. We need to provide more support on special education and struggling learners to teachers and students so immersion is available to them.

20. What additional support, outside the “usual” support, do you believe the immersion programs need? For example, translation of school communications, e.g., meeting minutes, is required, and must be high quality, and therefore costly. This is a basic need for the program, but the District does not cover the cost.

I believe immersion programs should get additional funds to cover translation. I also believe the library and teacher book budget should be doubled, to ensure materials in both languages. An example of my work in this area: recently the School Committee approved a media and library goal statement. The policy covered library and media in our schools and included a list of ways the district would provide a comprehensive set of supports and materials for all schools to support their learning needs. There was no mention of the bilingual programs – which need materials in two languages. I proposed an amendment, which passed unanimously, to ensure that all bilingual immersion programs would have a comprehensive range of materials available in the target language.

21. As a SC member, would you give Cambridge's existing dual immersion schools the same amount of support they currently get, more support, or less support?

No question in my mind - the district should give the immersion programs more support. Much more. It is a sad fact that the immersion programs have had to fight for their survival. I have consistently supported the programs, and know firsthand that many of the initiatives would not have happened without the parents and communities coming forth and advocating, and without the School Committee stepping in and advocating.

Evaluation

22. What is the matrix the School Committee uses to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of various types of language instruction the City has provided so far?

Honestly, evaluation has long been an area of weakness in CPS. That is why I advocated, successfully, for a new position of program evaluator to be added to the district. We don't know the effectiveness of many of our programs, not just world language. One concern expressed about expanding world language in grades K-5 was that the quality of the existing programs, aside from immersion, was weak. I agreed. However, we should then develop a high quality program.

23. What is the short list of criteria and relative importance of those criteria that the School Committee uses to make a decision on type of language instruction and related level of resources the City will provide?

The criteria specifically around language instruction do not exist for the School Committee as a whole. I have ensured that world language for all remains a goal for the district. I was the first member to specifically include world language for all starting in Kindergarten – which I did many years ago, long before this election. I have worked to bring that vision to reality. I am glad that now all the candidates embrace world language starting earlier. I am proud that my leadership on this issue has helped lead others to the vision and goal I set out years ago, before anyone else was articulating world language as a priority goal.

Policy Implementation/Policy Making

24. What do you believe was the program structure unanimously approved by the School Committee in December 2010 for the Mandarin Chinese immersion program at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School?

As a member of the School Committee then who voted to approve the CI program, I believe the School Committee vote for an immersion program for every grade in the school. That is what I believed I was voting for when I voted. At the time, the King School was K-8, now it is K-5 – which means I believed we were voting for immersion in every grade the King School had whether it would be K-8 or K-5. Having reviewed the record of the meeting including the transcript and watching the discussion and re-reading the background documents, I believe that we approved a Chinese immersion program without grade limitations.

That is what the motion states, and the discussion at the meeting was clear that a successful immersion program needed to continue through the grades.

25. In the last two years, the District, and the School Committee, dropped the ball twice. World languages for JK-5 have been pulled out and not put back in schools. The SC also had to go back and reconsider a unanimous vote taken on the Chinese Immersion program in 2010, a decision now considered debatable and unclear. How will you ensure the policies that the SC makes are sound, clearly defined, and that direct and support the Administration (as required by most School Committee code of ethics in MA)?
26. What will you do to make sure that the feedback loop with the District is functional and effective, in order to avoid having important policy changes fall through the cracks, and to ensure that there is sufficient clarity and definition in the policies that you make?

[25 & 26]: The World language JK-5 was definitely an issue of great disappointment to the community, and to the School Committee. There was frustration that we didn't learn about the lack of planning for world language in time to develop an alternative.

Honestly, the issue of the administration- School Committee communication and collaboration, or lack thereof is one that troubles me. I raised the issue at the superintendent evaluation as an area of deficiency. What I have done is bring to the School Committee and administration's attention the differences sometimes seen between policies adopted and policy implementation. Many have criticized me for doing so, but it is part of our job and a critically important role if we are to have a high functioning school district.

A key element for me will be to work with the PANGEA community, since the role of parents in the community is of central importance. The district has a stated commitment to strengthen family engagement. Ensuring that we live up to that commitment is one of my core values – that I have proven over time I will uphold.

Another key element is to work with MABE, with Utah’s Dept. of Education, and other immersion partners in bringing the expert perspective to the discussion. As I did when I brought in Gregg Roberts for a presentation, by ensuring that we listen to educational experts, I believe that we will be able to successfully advocate for best practices.

27. What suggestions do you have for working with the immersion programs, the district administration and the immersion families to address the disparate goals of increasing SES diversity within the immersion program, improving academic achievements and increasing the rigorousness of the immersion program to reach the stated program goals of listening, speaking, reading and writing proficiency in the foreign language?

We need to have a parent advisory council for immersion – as we do with special education. That group should come out of PANGEA and have regular meetings with the district coordinator for bilingual programs. I have worked tirelessly on all of these issues – balance and diversity, improved academic achievement, rigor and best practices. I believe that we need to document the current state of all three immersion programs, and set goals for higher expectations, higher achievement, greater mastery of language, based on established tests for language proficiency.

28. Since the School Committee role is to approve broad curriculum, the curriculum for all immersion programs need to be voted by the School Committee. If the any of the Immersion programs offer less than 50% foreign language instruction, or no foreign language instruction in one or more of the core areas of math, literacy, social studies and science, would you put forth a motion to follow best practice and require at least 50% of instruction be delivered in the foreign language?

Yes. The School Committee’s role is clear – the state advisory on district governance explicitly states that broad curriculum issues are decided by the School Committee. Since I don’t believe that one can have a successful immersion program without 50% core content delivered in the target language, I could not support a program unless it had that component.