

Dear Fellow SEPAC Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss my candidacy for Wayland School Committee. My name is Christina Rodrigo, I'm a mom to 3 elementary aged children, and a full-time attorney. Many of you may already know me from SEPAC where I am currently serving on the Board as the co-secretary and have been an active member since it was re-started in February 2020. I still recall that first meeting at The Local where I met so many members that have become good friends in addition to us becoming an important support network for each other. Being a parent is a learning experience on its own, but being a parent to a child with special needs can be a daunting journey. I've greatly appreciated learning from the experiences of others in Wayland's SEPAC and have sought to be a resource on many fronts to parents somewhere in their journey as well.

One of my strengths I am particularly proud of is my desire and ability to advocate for not only my own children, but others as well. I view myself as a problem-solver and have a strong desire to help parents to help their children. I believe all students should have an equitable educational experience, and have advocated and will continue to advocate for that in our schools. I am also a strong supporter of special education inclusion, when done correctly, because children can learn certain skills from their peers in a natural and more effective way than they can from adults. On the school committee I will advocate for equitable services for our students so they can achieve ambitious goals.

In special education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Not only do earlier interventions lead to better outcomes for students, but it is more cost-effective over the long term as well. In particular, students can achieve more advanced skills and usually need less interventions at older ages (which are typically more expensive than for students of younger ages). It is with that philosophy that I will work collaboratively with our administration to build programs in-district to support our students.

We should start by identifying cohorts of students with similar learning needs and build programs around those cohorts. This may be as simple as having existing staff obtain an additional certification, or long-term professional development. By having robust special education in-district earlier, we can achieve more while keeping students with their siblings and friends. This will reduce higher-cost out of district placements, which include costly tuition and transportation, and keep children learning in their community. It's a win-win!

Certain areas I would like to work with administration to budget for and implement are:

Increasing supports for dyslexia

- Starting July 1, 2023, all Massachusetts schools will be required to screen students in K-3 twice a year and notify their guardians if their child falls significantly below benchmark. With up to 20% of students having some degree of dyslexia, Wayland will need a plan to educate students that are identified.

- Negotiate with teachers (and make it a hiring requirement for new teachers) to obtain Orton-Gillingham certification, so that students can receive appropriate supports
- Focus reading supports on elementary levels to prepare students for middle school

Other areas for improvement

- Regular professional development to support executive functioning skills
- Guidance counselors, especially at the middle and high schools, focusing on anxiety
- Professional development for SLP's, including natural language acquisition and AAC (augmentative and alternative communication)
- Audit the number of children with autism and determine appropriate caseloads for BCBA
- Survey social skills programs at all levels, including adding back summer programs

While I've been very involved in SEPAC and my childrens' special education, I still have limited perspective. I might be missing some items to prioritize in this list above and I would love to hear more from all of you to learn about your concerns, what has worked well, or simply to make a connection! Feel free to reach out at rodrigoforwayland@gmail.com. You can also learn more about me at www.rodrigoforwayland.com.

Let's do this, together!

Christina Rodrigo