

5 Questions*

1. *What does it mean to be well-educated?*

An educated person possesses 21st century skills, is well read, knows history) in order not to repeat its mistakes) thinks about important issues confronting society and acts thoughtfully and after reflection. An educated person also has a body of specialized knowledge on which he /she bases his /her work.

2. *In recent years all those touched by public education have experienced a remarkable number of reform efforts — PARCC, DDMs, SEI-RETELL, RTTT**, Educator Evaluation, Common Core — presumably aimed at producing well-educated citizens. How has this reform armada changed, or how will it change the daily lives and educational practices of students and teachers in Massachusetts?*

The alphabet soup is a challenge but one that should cause decision makers to be careful when making decisions. I believe that a child's zip code should not determine his or her future. Rather, we are one nation and all our children should be offered the "same" opportunities and have the same "expectations." I think the Common Core is the right idea and if followed correctly can produce well-educated citizens all working toward being personally successful and societally responsible.

3. *Which educational systems in the U.S. or in other countries would you point to as a model for reform efforts here? What has made them successful?*

4.

There is no single system that we can adopt from another country. I have visited the UK, Canada, Puerto Rico, Israel and Finland over the years, looking at education (among other topics!). In each there was something that we could learn from:

Finland...not transformational teaching as I had expected but rather the respect afforded the profession so it attracts dedicated and well-educated people.

Israel...demanding requirements and a great deal of time spent in learning not just in school.

Puerto Rico...having resources matters. Poor schools cannot provide the same resources for teachers and students as well endowed schools. While money is not everything, it is essential.

Canada...avoid feeling that one is falling into someone else's shadow.

UK...a tradition of private (known as public) schooling which creates more divisions than the same bifurcation in the US

5. *If every school district in the Commonwealth chose one teacher with a minimum of 10 years classroom teaching experience to convene with the others to decide how to improve education in Massachusetts, what reforms do you think they would agree on?*

- How to use the ever-changing technology to improve student learning
- How to learn from all the tests to provide a better education so all the testing is not a waste of time, energy and money
- How to improve PD in order to stay current
- How to engage students so that they can learn independently and as part of a team
- What changes need to be made to pre-service education to enable novice teachers to be more effective at the start of their careers

6. Choose any one of the following statements to respond to.

With regard to my profession, I have truly attempted to live John Dewey's famous quotation (now likely cliché with me, I've used it so very often) that "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself." This type of total immersion is what I have always referred to as teaching "heavy," working hard, spending time, researching, attending to details and never feeling satisfied that I knew enough on any topic. I now find that this approach to my profession is not only devalued, but denigrated and perhaps, in some quarters despised. STEM rules the day and "data driven" education seeks only conformity, standardization, testing and a zombie-like adherence to the shallow and generic Common Core, along with a lockstep of oversimplified so-called Essential Learnings. Creativity, academic freedom, teacher autonomy, experimentation and innovation are being stifled in a misguided effort to fix what is not broken in our system of public education . . .

Gerald J. Conti, former teacher Westhill School, NY

Would that STEM did rule the day...then we would have creative and innovative learners and teachers and schools would be alive with energy, passion and productivity

What is wrong with having agreement about what students need to know and be able to do when they leave school?

Because schools are supported by public money there will always be political influence and attempted control...that does not mean that educators cannot teach the politicians about what is important in schooling and convince them about the right degree of control they should exercise. I do not see politicians telling teachers how to teach...just what the results need to be so we have a civilized and productive society. Pedagogy is the realm of the educator and should remain so as long as educators are well prepared in their pre-service programs.

*If you are uncomfortable with any one of the questions, feel free to substitute a question of your own that you feel is important to answer.

**Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; District-Determined Measures; Sheltered English Instruction/Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners; Race to the Top