



Worcester School Committee candidate profile: John Monfredo

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This week the Telegram & Gazette begins running profiles of the candidates for Worcester School Committee in this fall's election. All 13 candidates who are on the ballot for the city's Sept. 10 preliminary election were given an opportunity to answer a questionnaire.

Name: John F. Monfredo

Occupation: Retired educator, spent 20 years as principal of Belmont Community School.

Political experience: Ran for School Committee when I retired and have held the office for 14 years.

Connection to schools: Lifelong educator, have been involved in several community groups, and started the local literacy campaign Worcester: the City that Reads.

What are your top three platform issues?

Closing the achievement gap, including having students read at grade level by the end of third grade: It starts with early learning. So many of our students lag behind when entering kindergarten – let's get our legislators to fully fund full-day preschool. We should be placing preschool classes in all of our underperforming schools first and then at other schools.

Chronic absenteeism: At the core of school improvement and education reform and closing the achievement gap is the need for our students to be present, engaged and accounted for. A few years back we had more than 3,200 students

who had been absent over 18 times during the school year, more than 80% of whom were below grade level.

Parent involvement: Parents are a child's first and most influential teachers, and we must be committed to having strong parent partnerships. Research has clearly shown that there is a critical link between parent involvement and student achievement.

What is an issue in the schools you feel should get more attention?

Due to limited funding, we have neglected to have a comprehensive five-week summer program and an after-school program at all of our schools. We have more than 3,000 homeless students within the system, and more than 65% of the total student population is in poverty and more than 40% is reading below grade level by the end of third grade. Research shows that children not engaged in learning during the summer months lose two to three months of academic growth, thus widening the achievement gap.

Why should voters pick you to serve on the School Committee?

I have been an outstanding educator all my life, and have a working knowledge of schools and a good understanding of what they need to be successful. As a lifelong resident of Worcester, I know the city and its schools. I know the importance of parent participation and have a long history of working with parents. Most importantly, I have always displayed a strong work ethic, put an extraordinary amount of time into being a School Committee member, worked to bring additional funding to our district, been involved in the community, and am passionate about making a difference in the lives of our children and their families.