

**Washington Teachers' Union Local 6, AFT, AFL-CIO  
DC Candidate Questionnaire, April 2016**

**Please return to: [support@wtulocal6.net](mailto:support@wtulocal6.net) by 5pm on April 12, 2016**

**1. Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education in the District of Columbia**

The WTU believes that our public schools represent our nation's commitment to helping all children dream their dreams and achieve them. A high-quality public education for all children is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, a moral imperative and fundamental civil right, without which none of our rights can be realized fully. As part of this commitment to public schools, government should uphold, enact, and fund policies that fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed, including policies that:

- Provide for neighborhood schools, in walking distance, that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning;  
Do you support this policy?

Response: Yes, I support this policy.

- Ensure that teachers are well-prepared, are supported, have manageable class sizes and have time to collaborate so they can meet the individual needs of every child;  
Do you support this policy?

Response: Yes, I support this policy.

- Make sure our children have an engaging curriculum that includes art, music and the sciences;  
Do you support this policy?

Response: Yes, I support this policy.

- Ensure that children have access to wraparound services to meet their social, emotional and health needs.  
Do you support this policy?

Response: Yes, I support this policy.

Explain how you will support these policies and ensure funding for them

Response: Ensuring that all students across the District have access to a quality education is my top priority. As a former substitute teacher with DCPS, I have had the opportunity to teach in 40 schools in every ward, feeder pattern, and every age, ability, and discipline level. What I've observed is that the schools that experience the most success are those that have a strong principal, good culture, inspiring curriculum, committed teachers, wraparound services, involved parents, diverse student backgrounds, and a supportive community.

As a Councilmember, my role will be to advocate so that DCPS and DCPCS have the funding they need to provide a quality education. While budget concerns are always considered when deciding how much to spend, more weight should be given to the rising costs of education. Where appropriate, adjustments should be made to both the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula and "at-risk" funding so that our spending on education is more equitable.

## **2. Measuring and Closing the Achievement Gap**

Currently, more than 100,000 students attend our city's public schools. The teachers, paraprofessionals and other school employees who work with these students each day care deeply about the quality of public schools and the education their students receive.

While recent press has lauded D.C. schools for growth on the NAEP assessments, the latest *Education Week* "Quality Counts" report gave District of Columbia schools an "F" based on those same assessments, underscoring an increased growth in the achievement gap from 2003-2013, 38 times the national average.

Why do you believe there is an achievement gap?

Response: I attribute the achievement gap in the District to socioeconomic differences in neighborhoods across the city.

What policies would you support, and what specific new reforms do you propose to close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students?

Response: As an At-Large member of the Council, I will do better by the whole city to narrow the economic disparity across neighborhoods in the city, bringing economic development, jobs and vocational training opportunities where they haven't been fostered to date, and making sure there is ample access, via investments in housing and transportation to the places those opportunities exist now.

How are you going to ensure transparency in the budgeting process and make certain school funds (like Title I and At-Risk Funding) are being spent where they are legally required, most needed and where those funds will provide the most benefit to students?

Response: Transparency in the budgetary process is vital to ensuring that residents know and have a say in where their dollars are spent. Whether at the agency, Council, Mayor or mark-up stage of the budget process more opportunities should be given to the public to ask questions about where money is being spent. As Councilmember, I intend to do my part through budget hearings to ask questions that facilitate transparency.

### **3. Implementing the Common Core State Standards**

The WTU supports the implementation of the Common Core State Standards to address inequalities in public education and to give all students the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills they need to succeed. In order to properly implement the Common Core standards, there must be a deliberate and thoughtful plan of action for introducing new standards into schools, and making sure they are embraced by the community at large. Students need a strong, well-rounded curriculum, and teachers need the time, resources and support necessary to adapt their teaching to these ambitious new demands.

Although the district has made some strides to implement the Common Core State Standards, our members still are concerned about the quality of tools and supports for educators.

How would you ensure proper implementation of Common Core State Standards before sanctions are applied to schools, teachers and students?

Response: Proper implementation of Common Core Standards depends on making sure that educators have the right tools and support to embrace and address the diverse needs of **all** students. The reality is that regardless of how effectively our school district leaders develop and implement high-quality curricula aligned with Common Core Standards, some students will need additional support and interventions to be successful. As Councilmember, I will do my part to encourage the development and implementation of an instructional framework that gives educators the critical tools and additional time needed to support teaching and learning at differing levels.

How will you advocate for and actively support the explicit teaching of functional reading skills beginning in the early childhood years through grade 12 to ensure that DCPS graduates are literate, enabling them to become self-reliant, productive citizens?

Response: The key to improving literacy is starting early. As Councilmember, I will work to expand funding for pre-kindergarten education opportunities so that more students can get a head start on literacy.

How will you support students who are behind in math to catch up to their peers and graduate with their required credits?

Response: When implementing educational standards -- whether math or any other subject -- it is important that educators have the instructional resources they need to improve student achievement. When students who fall behind in math are properly identified, there should be more focused and targeted instruction and interventions used to supplement their core instructions, and where appropriate, intensive individualized instruction may be needed.

#### **4. Testing and Accountability**

Since *No Child Left Behind* was passed, annual standardized tests have been used to determine student proficiency levels. This testing data has been used primarily for making high-stakes decisions—reconstituting or closing schools and terminating staff. Proficiency levels have been criticized as providing inaccurate measures of the effectiveness of schools that serve students who are behind academically. For example, a school that helped all of their students learn one year of material still would have a low proficiency rating if those students had started a year or more behind grade-level.

Alternately, student growth models have been developed to determine how many years of academic growth students have made each year. Such models require that the school system has accurate measures of each student's skill mastery. This data then can be used to inform and adapt instruction. Acquiring this level of data requires tests that are adaptive — those designed to capture what a student knows, rather than simply whether they are performing at grade level.

What do you believe is the primary purpose of standardized testing?

Response: The primary purpose of standardized testing is to monitor student learning over time, and through this assessment hopefully identify areas of need and provide direction for change.

While I believe standardize testing can be a useful tool, I do think that at times we can get carried away by overemphasizing standardized tests at the expense giving teachers the flexibility to teach in the way they want, or that their students need.

Would you support rating schools and teachers based on an average-years-of-academic-growth model, rather than proficiency levels? If not, why?

Response: Yes, I would consider an average-years-of-academic-growth model rather than proficiency levels. It is important that we look at student's proficiency individually, and measure progress by relative improved proficiency.

Would you prefer Common Core-aligned adaptive tests over non-adaptive tests? If not, why?

Response: I am in support of adaptive testing.

## **5. Cultivating Labor-Management Collaboration**

In order to fulfill the promise of public education, the WTU believes the input of teachers and school employees is critical to the successful implementation of sustainable school reform. The collective bargaining process is the best way to guarantee that educators have a meaningful role in developing and implementing strategies to help students reach high academic standards. This includes the WTU having a meaningful voice in designing and implementing professional development, curricula and evaluation systems.

Specifically, what would change under your leadership to include the WTU in the decision-making process, and how would you include WTU's involvement in the design and implementation of the vision, school budgets, professional development, curricula and evaluation systems in DCPS?

Response: Professional development of teachers ultimately benefits students, so I would absolutely want WTU's input on how to better fund and design professional development, curricula and evaluation system. Encouraging collaboration both between leaders in various schools and between educators and policymakers is vital to ensuring we get education policy right in the District.

## **6. Ending Neighborhood School Closures**

In many areas of our city, safe and quality neighborhood and community schools are no longer are within easy walking distance for all students. In nearly five years, our communities have witnessed more than 40 school closures, limiting the access to walkable neighborhood schools and suitable feeder schools for students and families. Research is clear: there are no financial benefits to closing schools. In fact, studies demonstrate it actually costs more to close schools.

Under what circumstances would you authorize a traditional public school closure? How would you provide for the students affected by a traditional public school closure?

Response: Should a school fall well below accepted and targeted standards for improvement and achievement during a monitored period of time, I do believe it is in the city's and the children's best interest to either close or to re-program existing schools. I am a firm believer in walkable communities, and would work to make sure that buildings are retained for educational use rather than non-educational redevelopment.

If you are elected, will you support a moratorium on public school closures for at least five years? Why or why not?

Response: No. I believe every school's story is different and requires a different approach based on its individual levels of achievement and student success. I would not eliminate a tool for giving kids access to a quality education, even if that tool is sending them to another school. We should always seek to strengthen neighborhood schools, and work toward a system where none need to close.

How will you ensure that there are high-quality, walkable traditional neighborhood public schools accessible to every child in D.C.?

Response: I will ensure that there are high-quality, walkable traditional neighborhood public schools accessible to every child in D.C. by working with school leaders, parent/guardians and parent groups, and DCPS to provide schools with the resources they need to succeed. In the case of a neighborhood school being transferred to a public charter school, which often happens, I would support increased opportunities for local families to attend.

## **7. Serving Students with Special Needs**

The District has an obligation to provide students with special needs access to educational opportunities that are developmentally and emotionally appropriate. Due to lack of adequate staffing, oversight and targeted funding, students are not receiving their documented instructional (IEP) services — costing us millions in unnecessary lawsuits.

What structures and plans do you have to ensure students with special needs are receiving the services they need to succeed in school?

Response: Improving transparency in the budgetary process and increased funding for students with special needs are the two main ways that will ensure that student receive the services they need to succeed in school.

## **8. Holding Charter Schools Accountable**

Charter schools and DCPS are not operating on a level playing field. The WTU believes accountability and transparency for charter schools remain major problems in the District of Columbia, resulting in mismanaged funds and misplaced student allocations.

What do you think are the roles of charter schools in D.C.?

Response: While my goal is that every child in every neighborhood has a quality school they can walk to, and in some cases across the District, public charter schools give parents and students the choice to attend a school that more adequately addresses the student's needs.

Do you support requiring charter schools to meet the same requirements as traditional public schools, particularly as they relate to access for all students (i.e., special education)? Why or why not?

Response: Yes, all school should be held up to the same standards.

How will you ensure charter schools meet the same requirements as DCPS teachers? Should charter school teachers have the right to organize and join a union?

Response: Yes, charter school teachers should have the right to organize and join a union

As Councilmember, how will you pledge to solve the problem of misplaced and misdirected student allocations due to high student mobility from charter school to the traditional public school?

Response: More robust oversight and transparency.

## **9. Improving Early Childhood Education**

We know from research that high-quality early childhood education and care programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, preschool programs and full-day kindergarten increase the likelihood that young children, from birth to age five, will have the language and literacy foundation upon which later school success is built. Yet, as reflected in recent audit reports,

universal pre-K has not been realized in the District, as too few children in our city—especially impoverished children—have access to quality early childhood programs.

How will you ensure all young learners have access to high-quality early childhood programs with appropriate funding in all parts of the city?

Response: I am a supporter of universal pre-k and will do my part to make sure more children ages 3-4 have access to high-quality pre-k.

## **10. Implementing Supportive Teacher Development and Evaluation Systems**

The best teacher evaluation systems are designed mutually with teacher unions to offer what most teachers are asking for nationwide: a system that supports the continual growth and development of teachers.

Punitive approaches to teacher evaluation systems produce a constant churn of teachers through mutual consent arrangements and cash buyout options. Studies show that students, schools and communities are negatively affected by this lack of stability. Furthermore, a record number of teachers are leaving DCPS, with 126% turnover rate over the last 6 years and only 11% of those based on poor performance.

How would your office work to retain and respect the current population of DCPS teachers?

Response: Through the collective bargaining process, teachers, administrators and lawmakers should work to build consensus on overall goals that support continued growth and development of teachers.

## **11. Summary**

What are the three things the school district does well that you would continue to support and expand if elected?

- 1) Improving school facilities: we've done a great job of improving many school facilities across the District, but some communities are still being left behind. We must fully fund school renovation and modernization projects so that families have full confidence in our public school system and so that kids are given the best environment in which to succeed.
- 2) Magnet programs for the arts: using Duke Ellington School of the Arts as an example, the city should invest more heavily (and create additional schools) in magnet programming for kids interested in the arts. Additionally, we should model additional schools based on other interest groups: e.g. construction management.
- 3) Expanding Community School Model: The District has done a good job of developing partnerships with schools and community organizations, but more can be done to add to the number of Community Schools in the District, particularly in all schools that have a higher population of students who live in poverty.

What are the top three challenges facing public education in the District of Columbia, and how will you address them if you are elected?

- 1) Economic disparity: one of my top platform issues is making the District more inclusive of the full diversity of residents that call DC home, and better spreading economic development and diversity to communities that have been left behind. By creating opportunities and pathways to success for kids in all communities across the District, we will better serve kids as they grow through our public education system.
- 2) Lack of diversity of educational programming: right now many families are choosing charter programs because of their diversity of programming: e.g. language immersion. We must continue to invest in diverse programming that will lead our students to success, no matter which corner of the District they are in.
- 3) Improved Data Collection: Comprehensive data collection and consistent program evaluation will help DC allocate limited resources effectively and spot problems with programs that need to be addressed. With so many programs and school types, accurate and comprehensive data collection is important so that we can learn what the strengths and weaknesses are among the various programs.

If we endorse you and support your election, how will you work with us in the future?

Response: I am a firm believer in community-based leadership. As a previous two-term ANC Commissioner in Ward 6, I worked to bring community voices together so that more residents had a say on what their neighborhood looked like. If I am endorsed by WTU, I will work to bring visibility and viability to WTU's core concerns so that all students in the District can get a high-quality public education.

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