

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

Please return to: 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?

Yes

- 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?

Yes

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

Yes. I have introduced legislation to require such curriculum at all of our schools in each of the past several council periods. I will continue to do so and encourage my colleagues to support art, music, physical education, and other programs aimed at proving a more holistic approach to educating our children.

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

Yes. I believe this is one of the highest priority items we must address to improve the educational outcomes for all of our students.

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

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?

I believe the achievement gap is a reflection of

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

I continue to support additional wraparound services to aid the quality educational services that our teachers provide inside the classroom. We need to invest in additional counselors, psychologists, behavior techs and other professionals who can help our students who are struggling with serious issues that affect their ability to learn and behave in a classroom environment.

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?

I believe in strong auditing and accounting practices to ensure public funds are being used correctly and the public is able to see in clear terms where that money is going.

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?

I would push for collaboration between DCPS and teachers to ensure we have adequate resources and training to implement any new system of performance standards before we sanction schools, teachers, or students for failing to achieve them.

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.

Functional reading skills are at the core of much of education and I support services inside and outside of our schools to ensure all of our students develop this critical skill.

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

I will support budgets that provide the necessary resources to teachers and schools so that students can catch up to peers in math and other subjects.

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?

I believe any standardized testing should be use as only one of many measures of student

proficiency. I agree that student growth is a more fair and accurate measure of teacher and school performance, as well as student development.

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

Yes. In my opinion, a good teacher and school is one that helps create an environment that allows a student to learn and grow. That growth should be measured by a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures, but average-years-of-academic-growth, rather than proficiency level, should be the cornerstone of that evaluation process.

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

Yes. I believe that we now reliable technology to allow for adaptive tests that more provide better information about our students' academic growth, proficiency, and ability.

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?

I have always advocated, and continue to do so now, that WTU and our teachers should be a full partner at the table to improve our school system. I will continue to share my belief that our schools are strongest, and our students are best served, when teachers, parents, administrators, and students have a voice in our education system.

6. Ending Neighborhood School Closures

In many areas of our city, safe and quality neighborhood and community schools are no longer 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?

I don't support additional public school closures at this time.

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

Yes. I believe we have closed enough schools and now need to work to strengthen the neighborhood schools we have and look for opportunities where it makes sense to open new schools that allow students all across the District to have access to high-quality, nearby neighborhood elementary, middle, and high schools.

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

In my own Ward, I fought to prevent two of our neighborhood elementary schools, Francis-Stevens and Garrison, from being closed. We were successful in keeping those schools open, and I continue to push for additional investment to make those schools the strong neighborhood schools that our students deserve.

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?

I continue to support additional wraparound services to aid the quality educational services that our teachers provide inside the classroom. We need to invest in additional counselors, psychologists, behavior techs and other professionals who can help our students

who are struggling with serious issues that affect their ability to learn and behave in a classroom environment.

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.?

Charters schools are a reality of the District as long as the federal government forces them to exist. As a result, they are an inevitable part of our education system. That being said, I believe they should be held to the same standards and outcomes of our public schools.

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?

Yes

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?

Yes, I support the right of all workers to 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?

This issue will require DCPS, charter schools, and teachers working together to ensure every classroom and all students have adequate resources. I will work as a Councilmember to push for that collaboration.

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?

I believe this is a high priority issue for our city and will push my colleagues on the Council to continue to increase funding for early childhood programs.

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?

I will continue to work to implement the many objectives I have highlighted in this questionnaire to support teachers in the classroom through additional resources and wraparound services for students. Additionally, I will continue to push for collaboration between administrators and teachers to develop an evaluation process that rewards teachers for aiding students growth, rather than punishes teachers because students entered their classroom already behind on grade proficiency.

11. Summary

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

- 1. Employ high quality teachers and resources**
- 2. Focus on student performance**
- 3. Provide modern learning facilities**

We have high quality teachers, a commitment to make our schools better for students, and a program to modernize our schools. I believe we need to do more to retain our teachers and our students' evaluations should recognize academic growth, in addition to proficiency, but we as a city have the tools and attitude in place to improve our schools.

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. Achievement gap**
- 2. Aiding our students during the hours they are outside the classroom**
- 3. Limited support staff (counselors, psychologists, and behavior techs)**

We need to continue to invest in wraparound services that help our students work through challenges they are facing, allow our teachers to focus on education rather than behavioral or psychological challenges, and allow our students to flourish. We have the resources in our city to provide these services and we need to continue to make smart investments in helping our children succeed.

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

I will be available at all times to meet with WTU to discuss how we can make our school system, and as a result our city, stronger.

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