



Washington Teachers' Union 2016 Candidate Questionnaire



*"Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education
in the District of Columbia"*



Washington Teachers' Union

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Washington Teachers' Union

The Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) represents more than 5,000 active and retired teachers in Washington D.C. WTU and its members are dedicated to helping too provide D.C. Public School students with the best possible education, ensuring that there is social and educational justice for our students and their schools, and improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate students in D.C. Public Schools.

The mission of the Washington Teachers' Union is to:

- Raise the standards of the teaching profession by ensuring and promoting conditions vital to effective services for all students.
- Define and strengthen school services and to afford employees with a full opportunity to participate in the democratic decision-making process within schools for the common good.
- Protect the legal rights of all members.
- Provide and maintain, as the sole and exclusive collective representative for members of the bargaining unit, the effective implementation of the collective bargaining agreements between the Washington Teachers' Union and its employer.
- Make employees aware of their political and social rights and responsibilities.

The WTU and our members have a shared vision for the future of public education in our city. It's a vision of what parents want for their children, and what our community wants for its future. It's a vision that places our kids and public schools over privatizers and education profiteers. It's time to reclaim the promise.

Reclaiming the promise of great public education in the District of Columbia is about ensuring that:

- Neighborhood schools are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning;
- Teachers and school staff are well-prepared, are supported, have manageable class sizes and have time to collaborate to meet the needs of every child;
- Children have an engaging curriculum that focuses on teaching and learning, not testing, and includes art, music and the sciences; and
- Children and their families have access to wraparound services to meet their social, emotional and health needs.



Washington Teachers' Union

April 4, 2016

Dear Candidate,

We invite you to complete the Washington Teachers' Union's Committee on Political Education (COPE) issues questionnaire. COPE is comprised of and run by WTU members who work closely with the union's members to determine what issues are important to them and in turn communicate your ideas and potential policies to them.

There are a wide variety of issues that we deal with on a daily basis and all are directly impacted by the policies that our government puts into place. As a candidate for elective office, your views on how we can work together to best serve and educate all children in the District of Columbia are important to our members and our community.

This questionnaire is based on an internal survey of our members' interests. We will use the responses to inform our membership of your positions. You may use separate sheets of paper to complete this questionnaire.

Please email the committee with your responses to this questionnaire no later than Friday, April 11, 2016. Email your completed questionnaire to: [support\(a\),wtulocal6.net](mailto:support(a),wtulocal6.net).

To schedule an in-person interview with COPE during the week of April 18th, please call Jannett Lopez at: (202) 517-1477 or [email: support@wtulocal6.net](mailto:support@wtulocal6.net).

As a potential city official and leader, it's important that we know how you will work with WTU and its members to improve our schools and communities, and prepare our students for the future. We see this as the beginning of building greater connections between teachers and the government and elected leaders, and we look forward to strengthening this relationship in the future.

Respectfully,

Laura Fuchs, Committee Chair of the Committee on Political Education

COPE)

Jacquez Jones, Committee Co-Chair of the Committee on Public Education (COPE)

cc: Elizabeth Davis, President and Executive Board, Washington Teacher



Washington Teachers' Union

Candidate Information: _____

Name: LaRuby May _____ Ward: 8

Address: 3119 MLK Jr.

Phone: 202-971-6966 _____ Email: info@may4ward8.com

Date: Friday, April 8, 2016

Signature:

Please complete and return the Candidate Questionnaire by Friday, April 11, 2016, to:

WTU COPE Committee
c/o Washington Teachers' Union
1239 Pennsylvania Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Email questionnaires to:
support@wtulocal6.net

For additional questions, call:
(202) 517-1477



Washington Teachers' Union

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, I fully support safe, academically rich neighborhood schools. I believe that every child should have access to quality education on the neighborhood in which they live.

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, I understand that one of the keys to student success is a well-trained, well prepared teacher. Teacher planning and preparation time is an essential part of every academically successful program.

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

Yes, art, music, and science are all very important part of a well-rounded child. Enrichment programs often help students by teaching them important skills such as discipline. Art, music and science programs should be a standard part of every educational program.

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

Yes, I feel strongly that we have to give children and families the support they need to be successful. Sometimes that support will include areas that are not traditional academic in nature. However, I know that strong social emotional health will help every student reach true academic success.



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

I would support those initiatives that are working diligently to make all of our neighborhoods safe and welcoming to all who live and learn there.

To ensure that our teachers are well-prepared so they can meet individual needs of every child I would support those policies that hire and reward well trained teachers. I would strongly encourage administrators to commit to supporting these highly qualified teachers with the necessary tools (curriculum, time management, specialized training, etc.) to address the needs of every child.

The research totally demonstrates the importance of an intergraded STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) curriculum for all of our students. These initiatives have been introduced but I would strongly support such engaging curriculum at all levels.

With the current realization that without support in the social and emotional health areas, our children cannot be expected to succeed in their academics. I would strongly support training and if needed if needed, additional staff to provide for such needs of our children and their families, if possible.



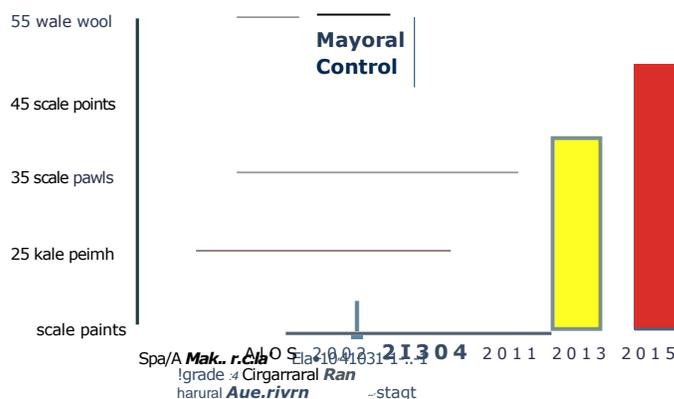
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2. Measuring and Closing the Achievement Gap

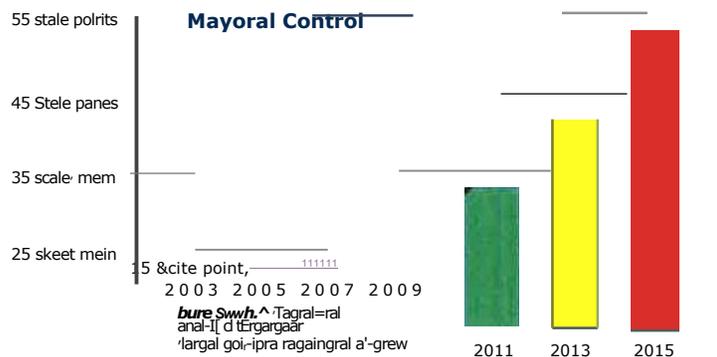
Currently, more than 100,000 students attend our city's public schools. The teachers, paraprofessionals and other school employees who work with these students each day care deeply about the quality of public schools and the education their students receive.

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 to 2013, 38 times the national average.

Achievement Gap in 8th Grade Reading



Achievement Gap in 8th Grade Math





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Why do you believe there is an achievement gap?

Many factors contribute to the achievement gap that we face here in the District of Columbia. Social, environmental and economic disparities are just a few of those factors that research often identifies as contributors to the achievement gap. In the District, we must work to overcome those barriers in order to start closing the achievement gap.

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

I believe that every school with a high achievement gap must offer complete wrap around services. These schools must work with the local government agencies in order to provide services that families need. I also believe that local government must do more to help ensure that students come to school each day. We cannot begin to close the achievement gap with the high absentee rates in our classes. We must have stricter policies around student's attendance. We must hold parents accountable for children who do not come to school a regular basis. Lastly, I believe that that policies around classroom sizes, specifically smaller classroom sizes, is a key component to closing the achievement gap. In the Social Equity Empowers Dreams Act I introduced you will see requirements around at-risk funding spending, teacher and administrative turnover and classroom sizes in an effort to bring accountability to DCPS for the gaps in achievement for our children.

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?

In order to ensure transparency, the budgeting process must be open to all stakeholders for input. The budget then must be opened to regular audits by independent agencies in order to ensure funds are being spent as allocated.



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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?

First, I applaud you for supporting the high standards of the Common Core State Standards. To ensure proper implementation, it is imperative that the teachers are trained and can demonstrate proficiency in the implementation of these standards before sanctions are applied.

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?

I would put major emphasis on pre-literacy skills and engagement in the early childhood years and continuing that accountability for a passion for learning from that age on.

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

In both math and reading, I would engage student peers and tutors to support those struggling students while enhancing the older students compassion and leadership skills.



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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?

My belief is that the primary purpose of standardized testing is to determine where a student is performing and to better determine the next steps for teaching.

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

I strongly support academic growth rates rather than proficiency levels with high expectations for all of our students.

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

I prefer adaptive tests over non-adaptive tests. It is important to have data that allows us to serve our children better, not simply to provide statistics for the jurisdiction as we know overall data improving does not speak to the achievement of our children. According to Michelle R. Davis,

Adaptive testing is really beneficial and can pinpoint a student's learning level more closely. Testing experts say that traditional, or fixed-form, exams work well with the majority of students, who hover around the level the assessment is seeking to evaluate. However, students at the farther ends of the spectrum—high achievers and struggling students—fare worse on those types of tests in terms of allowing teachers to identify exactly what material those students have or have not mastered. With exceptional students, a fixed test can't determine just how extensive their knowledge may be, and for struggling learners, it can't determine how far behind they may be. A teacher won't know exactly how far gaps in students' learning on certain concepts go because the test questions don't move far in that direction



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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 do not have the privilege of being a member of the Education Committee and do not know the role that WTU currently plays in the budget priorities of the committee that is sent to the Mayor. Nonetheless, I would invite WTU and other stakeholders such as parents to engage in the budget process with the committee in an effort to make sure that the budget reflects those ideas and concerns that get us all to our goal of providing better education opportunities for our children and families. I understand that it is our teachers and staff who are responsible for implementing curricula and are being evaluated, and making sure that WTU has a continuous role in that process beyond contract negotiations is important and a policy that I support.



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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 would work with DCPS school officials to ensure that closing a public school is a last resort. For me, there is no benefit in closing a neighborhood school.

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

Yes, because it is in the best interest of District youth to have a safe and effective neighborhood school.

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

High quality schools starts with high quality leadership and staff. We must make sure that every school in the District of Columbia has the best teachers receiving the best pay.



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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?

Ensuring that there are early intervention services that are strong and proactive. We know that many children with needs diagnosed early will not need services or as many as they grow. Working with their families to support and train is also crucial to the student's success.



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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.?

The laws that allows charter schools to operate are intended to give parents choices. It is responsible as local government officials to ensure that charter school are held accountable for the management of fund and student allocations. Transparency in all aspects of charter operations is paramount.

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, charter schools must be held to the same standards as every other school in the city.

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?

I would ensure DCPCS teachers meet same requirements through legislation. Yes, I support the rights of all teachers to be a part of 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?

I support a monthly student count, where funds follow students as they move from one school to another.



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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?

High Quality Universal is the key to our children's future success. Perhaps enlisting the medical sector to introduce and educate the families about the importance of every childhood educator. We can also hold our Early Childhood programs to high standards as well as on-going evaluations that determines areas of need and providing high quality administrators, teaching staff, and coaches is crucial.



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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?

Frequent visits supporting and recognizing the best in each schools. Over the past 11 months I have engaged with Principals and teachers in an effort to understand their concerns while trying to do all that I can to support their efforts to provide quality education for our children and families.



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11. Summary

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

DCPS does a great job offering a rich, diverse curriculum that allow students to follow a course of study that interest students.

DCPS has demonstrated a strong commitment to hiring and retaining quality educator.

DCPS teachers and principals do great work with limited resources. The creative programs that are happening in Ward 8 Schools are to be commended. I am thankful to participate in programs like family skate night with Garfield Elementary and Parents vs. Staff basketball game at Patterson. I am so thankful to have such great leaders and teachers and look forward to a continued relationship.

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 – (see earlier statement)**
- 2. Low High School Graduation rate – I work to strength the relationships, relevance, rigor.**
- 3. Teacher evaluation process – Work with WTU to continue to provide high quality professional development opportunities with all teachers.**

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

I had the opportunity to attend the WTU conference where I learned a great deal and was able to bring that knowledge back to the council and the result in the education initiatives that are in the SEED legislation. I am a champion for Ward 8 children and I know that education is an important foundation for our children and I look forward to learning from and with WTU to keep moving forward an aggressive education legislative agenda that will benefit the children and families I am blessed to serve.