

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

LEON T. ANDREWS JR RESPONSE

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, all schools in DC need to be safe zones where students can learn. Maslow's hierarchy of needs clearly outlines that the physiological and safety are at the foundation of human development.

- 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?

Teachers are a vital component to our society and must have the time and abilities to assure all of our students are learning. Excessive class sizes don't give teachers the time to address individual student needs. The Universal Design framework assures that all learners' academic needs are addressed. Addressing individual needs takes time, preparation and collaboration so it is necessary for teachers and school staff to have the time to collaborate to support students.

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/universal-design-education-principles-and-applications>

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

As Dr. Howard Gardner suggests, people have multiple intelligences and learn through various methods. Including art and music in schools is essential to developing citizens who are well rounded and can contribute to society in a productive way. Science is technology, it

is our future. Not having science in school is hurting our society and by not supporting the sciences we will not have citizens who will be able to participate in the global society and economy.

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

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?

This is a HUGE question stemming from inequities that date very far back, the unfair distribution of resources in the education system and the uneven distribution of wealth and how families contribute to schools to enhance them.

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

Compliance with common core, equal funding, assuring Head Start stays, low teacher to student ratio, less alternative teaching programs (although some work TFA doesn't make teachers who refine their practice-they use the experience to integrate that world view into other aspects of business) and retention of qualified teachers.

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 would rely on DCPS compliance standards and the Compliance Department within

DCPS.

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?

On-going professional development for teachers and administrators so they know how implement common core and refine their practice.

Sharing this resource with teachers and parents <http://achievethecore.org/>

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?

Supporting non-profit organizations like Reading Partners, FLOC (For Love of Children) and other non-profit service providers that support afterschool programming.

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

Provide additional teachers in schools where scores are significantly below, assure there are additional programs afterschool to teach foundational skills.

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?

So people can compare vastly different groups of learners based on the same criteria.

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

Yes. A struggling student in 3rd grade who reads at a Kindergarten level at the beginning of 3rd grade and ends the year reading at a 2nd grade level made 2 years of academic growth but is still not proficient. That type of growth shows significant work on part of the student and teacher.

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

I'm not sure what this means. We're teaching using Common Core standards. Evaluations should use Common Core standards to evaluate. It's logical.

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'm not familiar with WTU processes, so it would be difficult for me to recommend changes without first understanding your procedures.

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?

There are no circumstances in which I would authorize the closure of a traditional public school. We need more opportunities for people of all ages to learn how to read, write, or learn a skill.

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 in the mission of public schools, which is to provides a world-class education that prepares ALL of students, regardless of background or circumstance, for success in college, career and life.

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

In 2006, the DC Council passed legislation, without sunset, that directed the Chief Financial Officer to begin depositing the first \$100 million of non-dedicated sales tax revenue collected annually into the Public School Capital Improvement Fund, which was meant to modernize our public schools. I would re-define modernization so the completed schools, and those in the pipeline, were developed to meet the needs of all students for years to come.

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?

Regular due diligence of compliance. Not taking teachers out of classroom time for meetings or paperwork. Smaller caseloads to assure needs of students.

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.?

Charter schools have the same responsibilities as traditional public schools – we must hold them accountable to stringent oversight, just as we would a traditional school.

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?

<http://www.dcpcsb.org/>

This is why the school board was created. Yes they should be required to meet the needs of their students. All schools should regardless of their designation especially because charter schools receive federal/state funding.

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?

- 1. Facilitate conversations between the DC Public Charter School Board and DCPS.**
- 2. They choose to work in a charter. Working at a charter, you know that it is rare that teachers unionize. Charter school teachers are entitled to some of the same rights but by working at a charter, you often forgo membership to the 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?

Students are often removed from charter schools and sent back to public schools after the allocations have been released. We must stop this practice by charter schools.

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?

Equity of funding is essential, it's not an option. Attracting highly qualified teachers to challenging schools.

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?

As DCPS refines the teacher evaluation system, it is my understanding that next year outside evaluators will be nonexistent and all evaluations will be done “in house”, which bodes well for teachers, as their evaluators will have institutional knowledge of the challenges faced at a particular school.

11. Summary

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

- 1. Early Childhood Education (ECE)**
- 2. Maintain high standards based on an average-years-of-academic-growth model, rather than proficiency levels**
- 3. Teaching the whole child through traditional academics, music, art, and the sciences**

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

At a time when roughly 40% of DC students leave high school without a diploma, we need to put more emphasis on dropout prevention and recovery through multiple pathways to graduation, including: alternative high schools; credit recovery programs; flexible diploma and GED programs linked to job training; dual enrollment options; and other programs that offer wraparound services and connect classroom instruction with career and college readiness.

While these pathways may also involve re-engaging students in traditional high schools, we need to work with DC Public Schools to expand the number of alternative high schools available to students who struggle in traditional high school settings. Hallmarks of these alternative schools include a rigorous and relevant curriculum, project-based learning, close student-teacher relationships, youth voice and leadership development.

Additionally, I believe we need to support the following initiatives in our public schools:

- Promote reading proficiency by the end of third grade;**
- Recruit mentors to help, particularly our students of color, stay on track in school;**
- Push for in-school alternatives to suspension and expulsion;**
- Work to reduce chronic absence and truancy;**
- Develop alternative pathways to high school completion, including investing in vocational education and trade schools;**
- Ensure that students receive at least two healthy meals every school day and during the summer months when school is not in session;**
- Prioritize placing qualified teachers in places of need;**
- Support parental and family engagement to ensure they are empowered to be their child's first teacher and most important advocate;**
- Connect families with the diverse support systems they need for a safe, healthy and economically secure household; and**

- **Invest in creative funding strategies to allow communities to provide more comprehensive and collaborative systems of support for children and families.**

I will work with city agencies and community organizations to connect students in alternative high schools with supportive wraparound services. At the same time, I will forge better connections with post-secondary institutions and businesses to expand college and career options.

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

I would have an open door policy and encourage your general counsel to work directly with my committee clerk to ensure education legislation is written to the highest standards.

I would also be a voice within in my network for the WTU – fighting for your rights locally and nationally and, ensuring WTU members have a home in the many cities I work with should they relocate.

Please return to: support@wtulocal6.net by 5pm on April 12, 2016