

CPPS 2011 Seattle School Board Candidate Questionnaire

1. The Seattle Public Schools population is very diverse. Our student population is 57.3% non-white, 24% have an non-English speaking background, and 14% receive special education services. Also, 43.3% receive free and reduced price meals, which is a common measure of the number of families struggling with poverty. What have you done to familiarize yourself with the needs of such families and how are you prepared to serve them as a Board member?

I make strong efforts to listen to students and families, and to understand their issues, all across the city and spanning many income levels and languages. I have visited many schools in South and West Seattle (eg South Shore, Aki Kurose, Rainier Beach, Van Asselt, Sealth, Denny, Madison, Arbor Heights) as well as the SBOC and Interagency, and using a translator have spoken with non –English speaking parents at PTSA meetings at schools such as Northgate and Van Asselt. I have also reached out to Campagna Quetzal, El Centro de la Raza, the Urban League, and members of the Ethiopian community. It is especially important to reach out to these groups and families, as they are less likely to send me emails or appear at School Board meetings. I have also served as a volunteer on the District’s Student Disciplinary Appeals Council, where I have learned about some of our most struggling students.

I am committed to continue serving all students, no matter where they happen to live and no matter their family income or language ability.

2. What should board members and administrators should do to reach out to parents and enhance their participation in District planning and policy-making? How would you, as a board member, ensure that the district considers community input when making decisions?

I have worked very hard to reach out to SPS parents. In addition to the community meetings that I and all other Board members hold monthly, I am one of two Board members to send constituents a periodic email newsletter (using no SPS resources). I visit yearly each of the schools in my Director district and have made a point of visiting other schools all across the city – easily dozens of schools. I frequently visit PTSA meetings and have met on a number of occasions with parents and community organizations. My day time phone number is 623-2800, my personal email is PLMaier@aol.com.

There is always room to improve community engagement. For example, I would like to see if the process for public testimony at Board meetings can be made more satisfying both for those testifying and for the Board. Another mechanism that has been started in the past year and can be expanded is using the District’s new website management system for on-line surveys and for feedback from parents. I am open to other ideas and suggestions.

3. What are your top three priorities that would guide your decision-making as a board director and how would you build consensus to support your goals?

A. Make sure all students receive the education they need and deserve, no matter where they happen to live and regardless of their life circumstances. This means a continued and focused attack on the achievement gap and on providing rigorous and challenging classes and coursework for all students. There are no magic or one size cure alls. Improving our city's schools requires action on many fronts and levels. Short term, we need to continue to implement the new teacher and principal evaluation systems (now beginning year two) so as to strengthen instruction and provide educators with the support and feedback they need. We need to use the data in the annual District scorecard and the annual school reports to pinpoint where schools need improvement. We need to continue to strengthen math and science education. We need to bolster CTE courses and expand advanced learning opportunities. School such as Mercer Middle School have shown that the achievement gap can be closed, and we should build upon and replicate their successes. The new APP program at Ingraham and the STEM program at Cleveland are recent successes, as are the expanded language immersion programs at Beacon Hill, Concord and McDonald. Longer term, we need not only to continue these efforts, but also to expand the use of innovation schools (as specifically allowed in the current contract with SEA). See also the responses to question 9 about the achievement gap.

B. Provide the educational services our students need in a time of decreased state funding for K-12 schools. In the short term, the District needs to continue to run as leanly as possible while still remaining a fiscally prudent and legally compliant organization. Central administration has been reduced by about a third over the past two years, and this year transportation costs have been cut by about \$4 million a year. Due to these and other budget reductions, some very painful, the District is solvent, has a AAA bond rating and has a declining but still adequate unencumbered reserve of about \$14 million. Longer term, these cuts cannot be sustained without severely undermining K-12 education. The solution is a different, more stable basis for State funding of education (from pre-school through higher education). The McCleary lawsuit provides one route for such a solution, though as yet unrealized. Tax reform is another way to achieve the stable, adequate funding our state's students deserve. As the Board's Legislative Representative, I have advocated in Olympia for these reforms.

C. Provide physical building capacity for the expected increases in enrollment over the next five years. After a steady decline since the early 1990s, over the past two years SPS has seen an increase in enrollment – 1000 additional students last year and 1500 additional this fall. Over the next five years the current projection is an additional 5-6,000 students. That is great news for our city, but presents a challenge on how to provide building spaces for this increased enrollment. Short term, the District has re-opened three schools last year (Sand Point, McDonald, and Queen Anne) and two schools this year (Viewlands and Rainier View). Additional elementary schools likely will be re-opened in the next two to three years. Short term, the funds for the capital work needed to re-open these schools (for example to bring

them up to City Code requirements) were provided in the BTA III levy package that voters approved in Feb. 2010 and will be provided by monies remaining in the BEX III program, which is running under budget. Longer term, additional capital funds will be needed from the BEX IV levy renewal that will go before voters in Feb. 2013, for example a possible new middle school needed in the North end. As Chair of the Board's Operations Committee I took the lead in drafting the BTA III levy package and am already at work with staff and the other members of the Board in planning for the BEX IV levy projects.

4. What are specific ways you would seek to improve underperforming schools in the next year?

The annual School Reports that the Board and District initiated last year shine a spotlight on underperforming schools. Especially at time when the new Student Assignment Plan reduces attendance options, it is important that all schools be strong and meet their students' needs. The Weighted Staffing Standards direct more money per pupil to schools with ELL and low income students, which I believe is appropriate and should continue. An additional strategy is the District's performance management framework that increases the level of District intervention for underperforming schools. Simply giving additional funds to these schools is not sufficient; how the money is spent is also important. If schools spend their funds in the same way year after year, but don't have improved results in their performance, the same unacceptable outcomes will result. For a few schools, a complete restructuring may be required. The turnarounds at Cleveland HS and West Seattle Elementary (using SIG grant monies) are examples of how a restructuring can improve student education.

5. What do you think the district should do to ensure that students who are working below grade level will get early and effective interventions that will bring them up to grade level quickly?

The most important intervention is a pre-school, before students enter Kindergarten. The District is working with its community partners on enhanced pre-school opportunities and smoother transitions to Kindergarten, but more is needed. Early intervention is also important for kids needing special education services, as early identification and intervention can help prevent the later necessity of an IEP. Beyond Kindergarten, schools need to work with parents and community partners to make sure all students receive the additional services they need if they fall below grade level (or are heading in that direction). The District's Response to Intervention model (essentially, tailoring interventions to student needs and doing so at an early stage) is the right direction, but needs improvement in delivery.

6. What would you do to ensure that students who perform above grade level have access to challenging and rigorous learning opportunities?

Advanced learning is important, and I have supported it both within the District and as a Board representative lobbying Olympia for the retention of State funding for advanced learning. I have supported the expansion of APP to Ingraham, Spectrum to Arbor Heights, and the significant increase in the offering of AP courses in District high schools. Looking ahead, I would like to see the expansion and broadening of Spectrum and ALO programs, as well as an overall move towards more rigor and challenge in our secondary school courses. Those efforts are underway, and should continue.

7. Regarding standardized tests: do you think our schools are spending too much time and money on them, not enough, or just right? Please explain your answer with specific examples.

The state-mandated testing has changed almost yearly, which makes it difficult to compare data from year to year. I would like to see this stabilized. This year District MAP testing has been made optional for each school for the fall term, reducing the required tests from 3 to 2. Interestingly, more than half of SPS schools have voted on a school-wide basis to have their students take the MAP test in the fall even though it is not required by the District. At least for those 45+ schools this indicates that our educators find the MAP tests to be useful and worthwhile.

8. What do you think are the most effective specific strategies for closing the opportunity gap? Please provide examples of where you think the district is doing a good job of addressing the problem (if any) and how the district could do better.

Building strong schools is the place to start in addressing the gap. Schools such as Maple Elementary and Mercer MS and Denny MS and Sealth HS have made significant progress in closing the gap, with many of their students coming from low income families. The annual school reports instituted by the District last year shine a spotlight on where educational outcomes remain unacceptable for too many of our students. The school performance framework, with targeted financial assistance and programming that accompanies the reports, provides a way of addressing these deficiencies, as do the Weighted Staffing Standards.

SPS can't meet this need alone. Outside community support, such as the SIG grant at West Seattle Elementary and the Family and Education Levy and the Promise Neighborhood federal grant proposal for High Point, is needed to provide wrap-around community resources and to extend the school day and year.

One effort I am pleased to have had a key leadership role in accomplishing this year is bringing Powerful Schools to Northgate Elementary (a school in my District One that has a very high percentage of low income and English Language Learner students). I conceived the idea, met

with the new Principal at Northgate and with Powerful Schools to get the idea off the ground, and with others helped raise funds. As a result, last Spring a one-on-one reading tutoring program began at Northgate that is run by Powerful Schools. This is the first time Powerful Schools, which has operated successfully in the South End for many years, has had a program north of the Ship Canal.

9. How - if at all - would you advocate for enhanced student access to innovative and alternative programs such as language immersion, arts, Montessori instruction, or others?

I have advocated for the increase in language immersion schools, which in the last few years have expanded to include Beacon Hill, Concord, McDonald, Denny, Sealth and Ingraham. I hope this expansion can continue. I have also support alternative schools such as NOVA and Salmon Bay and TOPS. The new contract with the teachers' union SEA has on page 14 a provision for the development of "innovation schools", which I will encourage the District and SEA to follow up upon (for example with re-opened schools).

For the Arts, the School Board has adopted a Strategic Plan that includes as one of its core elements the building and strengthening of arts programs in schools across the District. In implementing the Strategic Plan, the Board has adopted budgets that help build music programs in schools that have lacked strong or equitable programs, for example by paying for musical instruments for Madrona K-8 and Aki Kurose MS and by funding the development of a stronger orchestra program at Nathan Hale HS. The District is working on a standards-based arts curriculum with the help of a major, one-year \$1 million competitive grant from the Wallace Foundation that was initiated in the past few months. The School Board approved this grant and helped facilitate it by providing a steady, focused leadership environment that encourages grant makers to choose Seattle Public Schools among many districts nationwide that apply for such grants. This grant focuses on planning for making arts programs more equitable across the District and for making programs stronger at those schools who due to past events or lack of community/PTSA resources do not have the arts programs that the school's students need and deserve. The hope and expectation is that Wallace Foundation will follow its planning grant with additional funding for implementation of the arts plan, as has occurred in other districts that have received planning grants from the Wallace Foundation.

More broadly, as a Board member, I have spent many hours lobbying Olympia for full funding of K-12 education and have worked to pass school levies that provide the funds for our schools. We do not have overall adequate funding of K-12 schools, with the result that language immersion, arts and other worthy programs do not receive the financial resources that are needed.

10. Please give specific examples of ways you think our district could do a better job of teaching math and science, as well as preparing students for the job market demands for technical skills?

Progress in being made in math, in that student test scores are rising across nearly all grade levels. More is needed: math is an emphasis area for the Board, and thus for the Superintendent's annual evaluation by the Board. I am interested in the expansion of "walk to math" programs, now used at about 13 elementary schools in SPS, whereby students are taught by the teachers with the strongest math teaching skills. As for Science, test scores have risen significantly, though more strengthening of science materials and classroom facilities is needed. A new STEM program at Cleveland is encouraging, but we need strong CTE programs in all of our high schools.