

CPPS 2011 Seattle School Board Candidate Questionnaire (Sherry Carr)

1. The Seattle Public Schools population is very diverse. Our student population is 57.3% non-white, 24% have a 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?

Four years of experience as a school board director and nine years of PTA leadership have provided great foundational experience for learning about the diversity of our SPS families and our broader community and their needs. I have participated in events from nearly every community, meeting them in their communities rather than expecting them to come to me. E.g. I have engaged extensively with the Native American community regarding the low achievement of their students and discussed change. I am a member of the Seattle Special Education PTSA and have met with their members and leaders, responding to inquiries, issues and concerns. I have worked with the Friends of SBOC in order to meet the needs of our newly immigrated population. I am deeply familiar with the achievement data in Seattle Public Schools by demographic group and sub demographic group. I have read "A Framework for Poverty" (required reading by our past Superintendent) and other related materials. This deepened my understanding of the struggles families in poverty situations face and how that impacts their student's performance in school. These experiences inform and enrich your viewpoint as a director and influence how you serve as you consider policy decisions.

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 believe that meaningful community engagement is the creation of genuine partnerships with parents, educators, unions, the business community, and the community at large that are leveraged to advance outcomes for students. Specifically:

Use more consistently our Community Engagement framework which defines the levels of engagement that can be applied for any decision facing the Board.

Work with philanthropic organizations for funding or obtain pro-bono services from companies that are experts in the area of public engagement.

Consider best practices currently in place in Boston Public Schools and elsewhere that have resulted in genuine community engagement. Leverage best practices at the City of Seattle.

Develop a set of 'working together' principles that outline how we will conduct ourselves in order to create an environment of respect. The principles should honor and celebrate racial and cultural differences, and use these differences as a source of strength upon which we can build.

Continue our work on the Community Schools model that will leverage the relationships with community volunteers, social service and youth service organizations to drive improved

academic outcomes for students. This strategy in particular is focused on engagement with low income families and communities of color.

As a director I have consistently insisted that staff take the input of families and the public into consideration. The result has been increased engagement and dialogue between staff and families as compared to the four years prior to my service on the Board (2003-2007). The challenge will continue to be where the community doesn't agree on solutions. Better communication will be required in these situations to enhance understanding of decisions made and mitigate impacts to the greatest possible extent.

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?

- Improving academic outcomes for all students and closing the achievement gap
- Implementing our SPS/SEA collective bargaining agreement
- Prioritizing dollars in our classrooms; looking for ways to close the budget gap elsewhere.
- Ensuring adequate capacity for our growing student population.

These priorities will guide my agenda and represent the critical needs that impact the most students in Seattle Public Schools. There is no "I" in "School Board." Progress is made through consensus building; we craft solutions that reflect the values of the majority of the Board and community. It is imperative that one remain open to the ideas and perspectives of others at all times. I would urge continued use of the 'guiding principles' where the board provides staff the values and broad thinking regarding outcomes. These views are informed by community input. I would use my leadership skills to shape staff developed solutions that resonate with other directors and the community in alignment with the guiding principles. I will also continue to leverage extensive benchmarking and best practices of other districts (both local and national) as well as other government agencies were applicable. I will use research to support my thinking.

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

I believe in ensuring that every child has equitable access to a high quality education in Seattle Public Schools and that each graduates ready for college, career and life.

Under the leadership of the School Board from 2007-2011, Seattle Public Schools is now providing detailed information on how each school, and the district overall, is performing. These reports also explain what we are doing to increase academic achievement and close the achievement gap in each school and across the district. For the first time, we have issued individual School Reports. We want to give parents, students and the community important information so we can all learn from and act on the data. These reports include each school's academic growth, student climate, accountability, family and staff engagement, and overall school performance. Additionally, schools are segmented into levels (1 through 5) based on absolute and relative student academic growth. This provides an objective way to determine which schools are truly underperforming. Once identified with objective data, these schools then

benefit from the performance management dollars. These dollars are allocated to the schools and the building team, along with the Education Director, determines which supports will benefit the students in their school (direct instructional strategies, additional professional development, etc.). With this framework in mind, I would look to support this process as follows:

- **Review the School Report data.** Understand clearly based on the facts which schools are underperforming and where students are falling further behind.
- **Understand the staff plan for performance management.** Ensure that the schools are receiving support consistent with their performance. Understand the dollar value of the performance management set-aside and understand its intended uses.
- **Understand the Education Director's plan for principal oversight.** One critical tactic that can be exercised is a change in building leadership. Another is professional development.
- **Understand the principal's plan for school improvement,** specifically what high leverage tactics will be used, how things will be different in order to drive different results.
- **Ensure the resources are allocated to implement the plan.** Improvement plans will require money and other resources. We need to ensure within our existing constraints that the principal has resources allocated through the performance management dollars.
- **Identify opportunities to further implement the community schools model.** Leverage the work that has been done, optimize City levy dollars, and identify new high leverage partnerships.
- **Ask what help is needed from me.** Determine if there are community relationships, policy changes, or political lobbying that I can do to advance their success.

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?

Use of assessment tools. One of the very best tools available to our teachers today is to leverage the results of MAP testing. The tool identifies the individual needs of each student, enabling teachers to target their instruction to fill those specific needs.

Use of high leverage programs and teaching strategies to enhance learning. Read 180 is a program that has demonstrated results for students and has been replicated across many schools.

Use our data to monitor and track student progress. Work done by the City's Office of Education showed us the correlation between students that fail classes and those that drop out. One class and the risk of dropout is about 50%, failure of two classes and that risk is about 90%. Systematic monitoring of student achievement data and grades can help us with dropout prevention.

Ensure that every teacher holds their students to high expectations. Evidence has shown us that student's can and will rise to the level of expectations set for them.

Implement a system of tiered interventions. Teachers need to have a predictable set of tools and services available to them to help with struggling students. These include academic, social and emotional supports.

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

I will start by emphasizing that I am supportive of highly capable programming and advanced learning, am committed to its success in Seattle Public Schools, and believe the all capable students deserve a high quality, stable, and sustainable set of offerings.

The first place I would start is to ensure we are all on the same page regarding what the mission is for our advanced learning program. We must ensure we have a suite of offerings that each have a clear purpose, are well integrated with each other, and are of equally high quality.

Next, I would work to understand what best practice for serving highly capable students is. For example, what does Bellevue do? Northshore? What can we learn from Puget Sound ESD or OSPI? Other districts nationally that do this well? What can we learn from them? We would want to refer to our Advanced Learning Program Audit of 2007-08 as well. It is also important to see what research supports these best practices.

Based on our learnings, we would need to evaluate what adjustments we would need to make to our program offerings. We are currently focused on ALO expansion to meet the needs of students in their own schools and APP, to the benign neglect of Spectrum. Is that the right answer based on what we learned? What do parents want? What is working and not working (I'm seeing focus groups here)? What thoughts/ideas/concerns do our teachers of highly capable students have? I do continue to see need for a pullout program such as APP. The cohort matters. Changes would need to be phased in over time to minimize the disruption to families.

Get alignment around the clear mission for each portion of advanced learning and ensure the program offerings integrate well. Ensure buy-in. I want to see an approach that has the support of educators, families, and the community. Make the necessary adjustments to ensure this happens.

Assuming in the above that there is an APP program (and I believe there would be), define the curriculum and supporting materials to ensure the same high quality program offering at all sites. Leverage the work already done and offer collaboration time across sites in order to ensure consistency. I still see lots of leeway here for teachers to supplement, add on, etc. in response to the needs of the individual learners.

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.

There are two types of standardized tests in place today. The state assessment tests are mandated by OSPI and have changed and shortened in recent years. Since these state level tests (MSP, HSP) are out of the direct influence of a school board director, I will target my answer on District assessment testing. Our district did implement Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) two years ago. The objective was to provide a tool to provide teachers information to inform their instructional practices based on the individual needs of each student. We began with testing grades K-9 three times per year. This past winter, I was the director that asked the Interim Superintendent and her team to benchmark peer districts nationally and the larger central Puget Sound districts to understand what their practices are regarding assessment testing. The sampling included districts such as Portland, Minneapolis, Denver, etc. and local nearby districts (Bellevue, Edmonds, etc.). The benchmarking information was valuable. We

learned that every district conducts assessment testing, and about half use MAP (Diebol was the other frequently used tool and one district created their own tests). We also learned that most test only two times per year and some don't cover as expansive a grade span. As a result of my inquiry, changes were made. We will test only twice a year (fall is now optional). We will monitor the grade span to determine if Kindergarten and 9th grade should be dropped. This means a reduced amount of time spent on MAP testing. It is interesting to note that while the fall test is no longer mandatory, over 40 of our schools have opted to assessment test using MAP anyway because they find it valuable and are able to improve student achievement based on what they learn from it. I would say that with these changes we are assessment testing at about the right level. We must continue to monitor the grade span.

Separately, there are two related impacts that must be addressed. First is the IT infrastructure. Connectivity to our buildings is outdated and slow. As a result, the MAP testing consumes the network and reduces the performance levels of the system. There was money approved in the last BEX to improve the infrastructure (a requirement identified for reasons that pre-dated MAP testing). That work needs to proceed to make the necessary upgrades. The other impact is the use of the libraries in some of our schools for conducting the assessment tests. This impact requires mitigation, likely on a school by school basis since each situation is unique.

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.

- **Ensuring a high quality teacher in every classroom that has the skills to identify and meet the needs of each student.** Our District management team and the SEA did a great job creating a breakthrough labor contract. The result is an enhanced performance evaluation system designed to identify and address struggling teachers and reward high performing teachers in a way that will leverage their talent and capabilities across more students. This work is in the early stages but holds much promise to improve the quality of instruction in every classroom in Seattle Public Schools.

- **Complete aligning the curriculum with grade level expectations.** Ensuring that every student has access to an equally high quality of education is imperative to closing the achievement gap. Benchmarking done in our own Seattle Public High Schools revealed that the same 10th grade class met 12th grade standards in some high schools and 9th grade standards in others. Ensuring that all classes meet their required grade level expectations is imperative to closing the opportunity gap. SPS has invested heavily in this work and is making progress. There is still work to do.

- **Defining and implementing a clear set of intervention strategies.** This has been an area of weakness for our school district. This year, our administration is rolling out a set of tiered interventions that include defined options for teachers and school level administrators to access for struggling students. These include access to social and emotional supports, academic supports, and are targeted at preventing and addressing dropout. This work is in the early stages.

- **Ensure teachers have time to collaborate and identify high leverage teaching strategies with a focus on replication.** Take the time to identify what is working, share with others and replicate best practices.

- **Ensuring culturally relevant curriculum and enhancing the cultural competency of our teachers.** It is important to ensure that reading assignments, coverage of history, and other curricular topics include content relevant to all students. Our district, for example, has begun the work to engage the Puget Sound Education Service District (ESD) to help with our Native American curriculum in response to requests from that community. This work is also in the early stages and there is much to do.
- **Continue to implement the 'Community Schools' policy and model.** Provide the wrap around services on site to students; ensure that volunteer efforts are coordinated and focused on the central mission of the building and on the students in order to maximize the results of the volunteer hours. The policy work is complete in SPS, now the focus must shift to implementation.
- **Conduct focused professional development for teachers** to improve instructional quality.
- **Conduct focused professional development for principals** to improve quality of instructional leadership
- **Increase investment in Early Learning** in order to close the gap that currently exists as soon as students enter school.
- **Offer extended day/extended year opportunities for students** to increase learning contact time and reduce knowledge loss during out of school time.
- **Increase the emphasis on high expectations.** Set the bar high and challenge each student to achieve high levels of performance; increase access to rigorous AP, IB and honors courses.
- **Apply targeted reduction to student/teacher ratios.** Research shows that results can be demonstrated where student/teacher ratios are at 15:1. Given the financial impact, efforts in this area will have to be targeted.

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 believe that all students should have equitable access to innovative and alternative programs. I have advocated expansion of both Montessori and language immersion in Seattle Public Schools, and have personally spent thousands of hours as a PTA parent fundraising for arts enrichment programming in our schools. Our new student assignment plan lays a strong foundation for implementing such a system. With it, we have expanded access to language immersion and Montessori, and have structured access to alternative programs and K-8s so that all families have access. We must continue to look for opportunities to expand offerings so that every student has access, and this likely includes consideration of the Option school designation for such programs. Key will be ensuring there is space in the attendance area schools for the geography now aligned to schools with these programs. Expansion of arts enrichment can be handled through curricular channels, ensuring that all schools have access to arts programming.

Another tactic that has prospects is the development of innovation schools. This is a part of our collective bargaining agreement that will enable educators and the district along with families to discuss new ideas for delivering education to Seattle's students. I look forward to this work.

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?

Improve the quality of instruction of math and science K-5. It is unrealistic to expect a K-5 generalist teacher to be excellent at instructing in every content area. I believe the time has come to fully leverage team teaching, allowing teachers to focus on their areas of strength. Teachers could be paired where one focuses on reading, writing, and social studies and the other on math and science. This reduces the number of teachers to be trained in any specialty area by 50%.

Aligning the math and science curricula to grade level expectations and selecting new textual materials, especially K-5. Eliminate the spiraling curriculum and return to the traditional sequencing of topics in math.

Continue to invest in STEM programs and expand to include K-8.

Leverage the business community to provide internship opportunities in the areas of engineering and manufacturing. The purpose of this partnership would be to ensure that students understand that math and science content knowledge will open the doors to high wage jobs. By making math and science relevant, students may be more inspired to engage in their studies. The Metropolitan Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturing Industrial Council are willing partners in this work.