

## **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?**

Asking, listening, learning, discussing. As a community-focused Board candidate, these have been my mantras both in deciding to run for Seattle School Board and in my thinking about how to be the best-possible Board representative for the parents and taxpayers of Seattle. As I mentioned in the CPPS forum, my involvement in my children's school (TOPS) which historically has drawn heavily from the SE part of Seattle, was an initial starting point for understanding how the District does and does not serve its diverse population. I am particularly keen to reach these diverse populations because District III, the seat for which I am running, is the most homogeneous District in SPS. It is largely Caucasian and largely a population that does not qualify for free/reduced lunch in SPS. I understand that District III does not reflect the overall makeup of SPS, so I have worked extra-diligently to reach out to other communities. I understand that SPS is not successful if only certain corners of the city boast of excellent public school programming and academic achievement levels. Seattle cannot succeed as a strong city, nor ultimately preserve middle class families choosing to live in our city, if we cannot address the needs of students in all corners of the city.

As a communications professional, I understand that I cannot expect busy families to come to me...I need to have my feet on the ground and travel to meet families where \*they\* are. So, I have spent significant amounts of time with various communities of color as well as in areas of the city outside District III to hear their hopes and concerns for their students. I have also made an extra effort to connect with families whose students receive special education services, as I believe our recent revamp of special education service delivery, as well as the previous history of special education service delivery, have fallen far short of the high quality these families deserve and demand.

I am a voracious reader and spend time each week learning how other cities address the same issues that challenge SPS. In addition, because of my professional background, I have focused, and would continue to focus as a board member, on how specific changes in District communications/marketing, District-community relationships and District outreach could enhance both the reality and the reputation of our schools.

**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?**

The Board recently weakened its public engagement practices...by not strongly insisting that motions brought at one meeting are not voted on until the next...and by stepping back from its former practice of identifying on the written notice of motions coming before the board the level of District/community engagement promised for the motion. Both issues might be perceived as “technical” in revision, but both items are indicators of the importance the Board places on public input. The Board can and should do better.

In my campaign I have talked about community-friendly revisions to the Board’s current operations: Board committee meetings, which largely happen during the workday and which are the place the work of the Board gets done (as opposed to the biweekly Wed. night meetings) should be recorded and available online for public review. The public should also be allowed to speak at committee meetings -- a practice which is currently prohibited. The Board should have a working communications plan to reach out to communities in which household language barriers and job responsibilities keep families who wish a voice in District governance from participating in policy-making decisions. The Board should add a new committee to its makeup: Community Outreach, Partnerships and Customer Service to be sure that Board-community interactions are significantly strengthened.

**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?**

Will my decisions help children learn?

Will my decisions help teachers (and staff) teach?

Will my decisions bring the Seattle community together in support of its schools?

(Underlying these priorities is a commitment to adhering to local, state and federal law as well as strong business and ethics practices as well as respectful interaction with labor partners and city citizens.)

I would build consensus by seeking out and then listening to a variety of information sources, and encouraging disparate points of view to consider the viewpoints of others. With money tight and the need to educate our students urgent, it is easy for civil, thoughtful conversations to take a backseat to 3-point agendas, deadlines, frayed tempers and pressed-for-time decisions. Yet the work of community outreach is fundamental to building a stronger base of support for this District. Obviously it will be impossible for all viewpoints to feel satisfied with Board votes that can often be controversial. But inclusion in the decision-making process and the opportunity for

the public to hear the viewpoints of others is a fundamental part of building a strong governance process.

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

I would instruct the superintendent to look to our principal corps. Great schools start with the leadership of a great principal who can lead staff and strengthen family and community support of a school's students. I would work to incent our strongest principals to serve at schools where the bulk of the population struggles to meet grade-level academic goals.

I would encourage asking (vs. telling) teachers and support staff how the District could support their efforts to better-reach their students. From more school supplies to more time for team teaching...from professional development opportunities for the teachers to resources focused on minimizing students absences...teachers within each school know what their students need but currently may not be getting.

I would provide a framework by which schools could apply for course curriculum waivers if they could show that a different pace or approach would better-serve their specific population.

I would minimize Title I dollars being held downtown in our District's Performance Management initiative, and instead move back to site-specific use of those funds as guided by the leadership at that particular school.

I would work with community groups to provide schools without active PTAs the benefits that schools with active PTAs often receive...varied extracurricular programming, tutoring, legislative advocacy and events to draw the parent and surrounding geographical community together on behalf of the school's students.

**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 Board needs to create policy and to direct budget toward these efforts. Right now there is little at the Board level to assure prioritization of District operations for early and effective academic interventions. The Board also needs to assure that more initiative is taken in this area by making a coherent, comprehensive, replicable suite of intervention tactics, and their rollout, a key piece of the superintendent's performance goals and subsequent review. Part of this suite of early and effective intervention tactics should include family engagement mechanisms to be sure parents and caregivers are given the opportunity and encouragement to bolster their student's performance through parent/school teamwork.

In the early grades, I would like to see bold initiatives in policy, budgeting and operations to assure that by Grade 3, students are reading to learn, vs. learning to read. This could include screening for cognitive processing disabilities that often go unidentified and hinder reading skills. Mastering reading is the key to success in school and in becoming a life-long learner. Remediation of poor reading skills later in a student's school career is more problematic and time consuming than doubling-down, as a system, on intense support of learning reading skills in early grade school.

I would also like to see the Board take the lead on recruiting a Citizen Tutoring Corps that would come alongside teachers and staff to provide 1:1 help for students working to gain proficiency in a subject.

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

A roadmap for the District's advanced learning programming (ALOs, Spectrum, APP) is now years overdue. Without visionary leadership at the Board level (via the Curriculum and Instruction Committee), access to advanced learning programming will continue to be limited in various schools and geographic areas within the city. Additionally, program quality at various schools will continue to be inconsistent.

The Board needs to signal its strong support of advanced learning opportunities, as every child in SPS deserves to be offered a learning environment where they are challenged. The APP community needs a long-term home(s) for its students in the North, Central and South parts of the city. The District needs to decide whether Spectrum should be offered as a self-contained program or within a general ed classroom or both. Further, if the self-contained model is recommended, the District needs to determine whether it is feasible to offer this coursework in neighborhood schools or whether the capacity pressures and variations in population inherent in the new student assignment plan will necessitate placement of Spectrum at option schools within each middle school service area. ALOs currently are the least-defined of all, and in some cases consist of little more than worksheet "busywork" for accelerated students. Again, vision is needed from Central Administration for the range of options and implementation details for ALOs. After standards are set, professional development opportunities need to be available for teachers around both advanced learning as well as differentiation within a general education classroom.

**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 is a difference between standardized tests and high stakes standardized tests. Standardized tests may be used for formative or determinative (sometimes referred to as "high

stakes testing”) purposes. My philosophy is to minimize determinative standardized tests, as strong performance on standardized tests is only one of many indicators that a student is being taught to be a life-long learner, positive contributor to society, and ready for college or career. Not all students test well, and there are certain segments of our student population, including some of our students receiving special education services, for whom high stakes testing is particularly challenging. In addition, “teaching to the test” is a well-known undesirable outcome of education systems focused primarily on test results. There are many examples of nations where high stakes testing is minimized, with greater positive results for student learning...Finland’s education system is a current, popular example of this philosophy. That said, as part of the state of WA education system, there is little room for debate around SPS participation in state-mandated testing. Many higher ed institutions also insist on high stakes standardized test results – such as the SAT – as one component of admission. Again, SPS has minimal input on these decisions. With specific reference to MAP, a standardized, formative test implemented by Supt. Goodloe-Johnson’s administration, I am not a particular fan of its implementation in SPS. This formative test is being used in high stakes ways for which it was not designed. In addition, its usefulness and margin of error tend to negate results in our earliest elementary grades as well as, notably, among our students who are most-accelerated in their studies. The test itself does have merit as one assessment tool of student growth, but its cost of implementation, time needed for teacher training, uneven rollout and displacement of student bodies from some schools’ libraries during testing time, means I would not have made this a high-priority expenditure. MAP is now used in conjunction w/ the new SPS teacher’s contract and as a screening tool to recommend young students for APP. In both cases, other instruments could be used to achieve the same objectives.

Recent neurological research indicates that formative standardized testing – or formative NON-standardized testing, can be used to help students master subject areas. This is not news to teachers who for decades have used short, frequent quizzes in classrooms to assess student progress and help with knowledge retention.

**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.**

Because of the Opportunity Gap’s strong correlation to poverty, efforts to educate all of our students must recognize the needs for supports for students whose homes do not reinforce the lessons learned and opportunities provided at school. Research shows that school in the summer (as opposed to summer school) and extended school hours are effective methods of extending learning opportunities to students of poverty.

In the Families and Education Levy on the ballot this November, both SPS and the City of Seattle show that they recognize the critical importance of wrap-around academic services and additional services key to learning (such as assuring access to health care via in-school health care clinics in high school). I strongly support this levy, and am pleased that the City will be handling the finances and program reviews associated with it, in order to assure taxpayers that the program will be well-run.

As noted in other answers on this form, a coherent system of supports for struggling students and an emphasis on being sure every child leaving 3<sup>rd</sup> grade has the reading skills to learn, are both key. The District needs to re-prioritize school counselors and consider ways to provide them across all grade levels, even if the state does not provide full funding for the amount of counselor resources our community believes is necessary. And our special education programming needs much work.

For English Language Learners, we need to strengthen our focus on timely family outreach, using materials in the language spoken at home. For communities of color, it is important that our human resources department sets up a program to encourage teachers of color to apply for employment in SPS and for all teachers to receive cultural competency training to effectively interact with communities unlike their own.

**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?**

For many years I have been an outspoken advocate for stronger programming roadmaps from our District's central administration. (My own children are enrolled in an alternative school.) In particular, I wanted to see this sort of roadmap rolled out in conjunction with our city's return to neighborhood schools in the New Student Assignment Plan. This did not happen when the NSAP was approved by our current Board, and in particular, I felt this was extremely unfortunate for our Southeast community, as many families with the ability to make a choice had opted out of their local schools for decades and had little confidence that their local school could offer their students an adequate education. (To the Board's credit, it has now recognized the need for what it calls "program parity" and has made it a priority for the superintendent in the coming year. Unfortunately, District staff was noticeably cool to taking on this admittedly time-intensive planning work, but it must be done. All families in Seattle deserve not only a solid neighborhood school, but also access to alternative programs to inspire and meet the needs of students for whom neighborhood schools are not a perfect fit.)

Support of innovative and alternative programming is also good business practice. They are a strong District enticement to communities which have traditionally rejected a particular

neighborhood school -- signaling that it is worthwhile for individual parents and taxpayers to spend their time and money and attention on a particular school. Beacon Hill International is a textbook example of a school with a poor reputation that was turned into a magnet for families and a cornerstone of the Beacon Hill community, by placement of a language immersion program in the school. The program recognized the diversity of ethnic backgrounds residing near the school and it attracted families who saw immersion in non-English languages as a benefit instead of a drawback. At Daniel Bagley in the NW part of the city, a Montessori program was similarly used to draw interest in a formerly under-enrolled school. Bagley now routinely is at capacity, with a wait list, for entrance to the school.

**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?**

I am not convinced that our grade-school level math curriculum is the best choice for our students. It is text-heavy (difficult for our many English language-learners as well as those students struggling to become strong readers), assumes a heavy degree of family-involvement in basic math mastery skills (unfortunately, family involvement in homework is not a “given” for many of our students), and has a “spiraling” introduction to math subjects (which is exciting for some students but confusing for many others, and without funding for math “specialists” or tutors in schools, means many students seem to struggle with comprehension of basic math topics). Although our District administration says it is OK to “supplement” its math curriculum with other textbooks, this is unachievable in many schools, which are limited by funding available for such supplements as well as by classroom time available to teach supplemental material.

At the high school level, I would like to see a return to “project-based” math opportunities for those who are interested in pursuing a career right out of high school, or who are excited about a specific career path after college. This does not mean that students shouldn’t be required to meet state-mandated math requirements...but in addition to base-level skills, our state employers in manufacturing, the trades, and high tech have repeatedly asked for our public schools to provide math skills applicable to their labor force needs. The SPS Board recognizes that Skills Centers, which disappeared a generation of students ago, are indeed a good idea...but funding and vision of implementation has been slow-going. A greater tie-in between local employers and schools via internship programs would be an additional way to build such skills, but unfortunately, the cuts of counselor positions within SPS has limited such innovative yet common-sense programs. Counselor positions need to return to elementary, middle and high schools.

Additional professional development opportunities in the K-8 grade bands for math and science teachers, as well as recruitment of teachers with math/science training, would benefit our

students. At the high school level, attempts by the District to put a “floor” in place as far as expected math/science mastery at each grade level should not also put a ceiling on such mastery. Last year’s attempt to roll out a standardized high school science path was troubling because it threatened to dismantle well-regarded, innovative science offerings at both Ballard and Garfield high schools.