

## **CPPS 2011 Seattle School Board Candidate Questionnaire (Sundquist)**

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 have taken many steps to familiarize myself with the needs of these families, although I recognize there is always a need for more outreach. Within my responsibilities as a school board director, I have attended many events and meetings of groups like the Special Education PTSA, Friends of SBOC, Neighborhood House community education forums, community meetings at many schools with substantial underserved populations such as Roxhill and Sanislo Elementaries, Denny MS, Chief Sealth, Rainier Beach and Cleveland High Schools. I have also attended events like a summer community picnic in South Park with a Spanish language interpreter so I could communicate more successfully with local parents. I have attended many board work sessions on topics that were important to these families, including district approaches on how to be successful with English Language Learners, Special Education, and students impacted by poverty. Finally, through non-school district work with organizations like Social Venture Partners and the Urban League I have developed additional relationships and insights. In terms of serving these families, I have advocated hard for policies and approaches that promote equity and access, disproportionate funding if needed, and accountability for improving results. Examples include our school improvement framework, system-wide assessment, dual language at Concord ES, and incentives to attract teachers to our high-poverty 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?

There are many tools & techniques that can be used to accomplish this, and community input should always be a factor in decision-making. The level of community engagement that the board and district proactively seek will vary by topic, as the high volume of work and scarce resources like time and money make maximum engagement an inappropriate goal for every topic. One of the key ways that directors ensure the appropriate level of public engagement is to explicitly choose the engagement level at the front of significant decision processes. Having said that, potential engagement tools include district and partner-sponsored community meetings, surveys (particularly online and/or school-based), outbound mail in student backpacks, media outreach, director visits to PTSA meetings, school board director community meetings (I hold two per month), e-mail, snail mail, etc. I also periodically update my website and send proactive e-mails to my distribution list highlighting upcoming decision processes and past

decision rationales.

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?

My top three priorities are: 1) To facilitate system-wide change that increases access, accountability, equity, support, and academic rigor; 2) To successfully implement our nationally recognized teacher and principal contracts; and 3) To improve the district's and board's engagement with our community.

These issues are important because without system-wide change the inequities that create our persistent opportunity gap will continue to hinder the achievement of our children. The teacher and principal contracts represent the district's biggest opportunity to improve the quality of instruction for all our children, and improving the district's engagement with our community will help to build the needed public and political will to address the socio-economic, racial, and educational challenges that we face.

I am building consensus on these issues through my outreach and advocacy in our community, within the senior levels of the school district administration, and with my director colleagues. I give presentations to groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis, I attend PTA meetings proactively and by request, I communicate with the media, I have a website, I periodically send e-mail to my distribution list, I hold two open community meetings per month, and I'm always communicating with parents and citizens through e-mail and snail mail.

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

Broadly, I am focusing on two kinds of initiatives to improve underperforming schools. One is school-based accountability and improvement, and the other is community partnerships. Examples of the former include schools in my area like West Seattle Elementary, Denny Middle School, and Chief Sealth High School. Each has evolved in its own way, but all are characterized by strong leaders, strong programs like IB and pre-IB, shared focus among the staff and community on helping all students succeed, and a commitment to improving instruction. Programs like IB are delivered in an inclusive format so that many traditionally under-served students are included, and they are also used to raise the expectations for all and to improve instruction for all students. A rare federal grant has also helped at West Seattle Elementary, but the shared commitment to raise student achievement made the grant possible. The district's school improvement framework, which I and my board colleagues passed as policy, set the district- and school-level accountability structures into place to ensure a continuing focus on results, and interventions when required.

Community Partnerships are also required. Students have enormous support needs, from medical to family to tutorial, and the schools cannot meet these needs on their own. Unless these needs are met, our students will not achieve to their full academic potential. The board, with my support and

leadership, passed a new community partnerships policy in June to help the district better align and leverage these partnerships to deliver benefits for our students. Recent examples include major district partnerships with Seattle University and the Seattle Housing Authority to better serve students in the Central Area, and with Neighborhood House to serve students in the High Point area of West Seattle. The City of Seattle's Families and Education Levy serves a similar purpose.

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?

I believe all of our students should receive high quality core instruction, and, if appropriate, effective and research-supported interventions that match their needs if they are not being successful. Keys to doing this well systemically include a system-wide assessment like MAP which I have supported and which we now have in place; and a tiered system of classroom-based, then small group-based, and finally individual student-focused interventions. District administration leadership believes in the core principles of MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support), but it now needs to be aggressively implemented district-wide, including a simplified inventory of district-supported interventions. Implementation rather than significant policy development is now the key to SPS progress in this area, which means looking forward it will fall more to the oversight portion of the board's responsibilities.

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

I continue to be a supporter of Seattle's Advanced Learning Program. Several years ago I was also a part of the citizen's group that brought the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program to Chief Sealth High School. Under the current board, and with my support and leadership, our district's APP and Spectrum programs have expanded. APP is now serving a greater number and an increasingly diverse group of students, most likely because of our system-wide MAP implementation which is enabling the district to identify more students who might qualify. We also have more Spectrum sites, including at both Arbor Heights ES and Madison MS in my director district. Going forward, we need to ensure equitable access to these programs, and specifically for Spectrum, a more even and high quality implementation across all of our schools. Our Advanced Learning Opportunities (ALO) program also needs to be brought to all of our schools, or if that is deemed infeasible for some reason, we need to raise the expectations for each school regarding their need to appropriately challenge all of our students.

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.

I am very supportive of a system-wide assessment capability, so in general I believe we have made substantial progress in improving access, accountability, and rigor through our implementation of MAP.

Many parents have been pleased to gain a deeper understanding of where their children are progressing and where they are struggling as they progress. Having said that, there are clearly some issues in our implementation that I believe we need to explore and perhaps change. In general, instructional time and shared school resources like computers and libraries have been significantly impacted, and I agreed with our decision to make fall MAP testing optional to reduce the impact in these areas. Additionally, I want to review our use of MAP with Kindergartners for age-appropriateness, and with 9<sup>th</sup> graders as well. If we ultimately choose to discontinue MAP for these students we will save money with NWEA in addition to gaining back instruction time and shared school resources.

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.

I believe the strategies for closing the achievement gap are similar to those for improving under-performing schools, so please refer back to question 4 above. That is, I am focusing on school-based accountability and improvement, as well as community partnerships, particularly to increase the number and type of wrap-around services available to our students. In addition to these strategies and the examples I cited above, early learning is also critical, and I am pleased that the district is pushing forward with a number of initiatives in this area.

More specifically, I would suggest that Seattle success stories are emerging at West Seattle Elementary School, and Mercer Middle School. At West Seattle ES, a strong and experienced principal is providing needed leadership and focus, and the SIG grant has enabled her to purchase additional instructional time and services (such as an additional administrator to enable her to focus on improving instruction) that are badly needed. At Mercer MS, strong principal leadership has also been an important part of the story, as has a willingness to experiment with strategies like using both the board-approved math textual materials in combination with other materials like Saxon Math for struggling learners.

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?

Given the district's financial challenges and rapid enrollment growth, this will be a challenge. However, I am pleased that our board recognizes the issue, and at our September Board Retreat we reached agreement with the administration to create a framework/plan by next September. I see this as an unfinished component of our New Student Assignment Plan implementation. Funding such a plan will likely be an obstacle, but until we offer the community a vision/framework for what we would like to have in place in Seattle, and then evolve the framework through discussion with the community, we will not be able to attract the partners and money that will be needed. So, my first priority is to ensure that our governance team creates this framework, and then engages in a vigorous conversation with our

community so that it ultimately reflects our collective wishes. Then, we will have many opportunities for advocacy.

More specifically with the arts, I believe the key to making progress in this area is through partnerships. I am delighted that through both board and administration advocacy we have won a large planning grant from the Wallace Foundation to create a district-wide arts access plan, and I look forward to working hard to ensure that we win the subsequent implementation grant as well. I'm also delighted that both the board and administration have been active partners with the City, with the Seattle Art Museum, and with many other partners to expand arts opportunities for our students across Seattle's schools.

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?

In the area of math, I believe many strategies need to be pursued. With textual materials adoptions, we need to continue to closely follow the findings of high-quality research, which as yet does not support the exclusive use of either student-centered or teacher-directed instruction. However, we need to reduce our reliance on materials that use "spiraling" instruction, as most researchers agree this approach is ineffective. We also need to provide more professional development to our teachers. This has increased in recent years, and many teachers have found it beneficial. We also need to grant more instructional materials waivers when school staffs and/or communities have a consensus about how they want to teach math. These waivers will need to follow specific expectations with regard to subsequent improvement. School staffs should also adopt specific strategies regarding supplementary materials, as Mercer MS has done with Saxon math. Additionally, I support more specialization of instruction in elementary school through programs like Walk to Math, and I have been an active supporter of our new project-based learning STEM initiative at Cleveland High School. In science, I will push for more partnerships with local and regional community-based organizations that can bring exciting project and field opportunities to our students to increase their excitement and engagement. Project-based learning will be critical to increasing our progress in science.

Finally, we need to provide more career and technical education (CTE) opportunities to our students across the district. I will continue to advocate for a faster deployment (unfortunately this is about money) of our distributed Skills Center strategy.