

Dear Candidate,

We are writing to invite you to complete the following questionnaire of the Washington Teachers' Union's Committee on Political Education (COPE).

You will also possibly be invited to be interviewed in person by WTU members in late August if we need further clarity on positions in making our endorsement decisions.

Please send the completed questionnaire by close of business **August 17th** to cope@wtulocal6.net

Respectfully,

Laura Fuchs, Committee Chair of the Committee on Political Education (COPE)

cc: Elizabeth Davis, President and Executive Board, Washington Teachers' Union

Candidate Information:

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Important Note on completion of the questionnaire: The best way to complete this questionnaire is to fill it out in Microsoft Word and type your responses in to the boxes below the question (they will expand as you go).

Please call COPE Chair Laura Fuchs at 202/683-7981 if you have any questions or concerns.

1. Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education in the District of Columbia

A high-quality public education for all children is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, and a moral imperative and fundamental civil right, without which none of our rights can be realized fully.

What steps will you take to ensure that:

- Neighborhood schools are in walking distance from the homes of students.

Preserving and restoring neighborhood schools should be a priority. Their closure, especially east of the river, was unwarranted, and as such was opposed by residents and Empower DC. Reopening neighborhood schools should be coupled with bringing back the families displaced by gentrification, now living in “Ward 9”, in a robust program of providing truly affordable housing, particularly by mechanisms outside the market, such as public/social housing, coops, community land trusts, thus taking advantage of the positive contribution to integration from gentrification.

- Teachers are well-prepared, supported, have manageable class sizes and have time to collaborate so they can meet the individual needs of every child;

Sufficient resources must be made available to teachers, with class sizes corresponding to the optimal student-to-teacher ratio based on best practice. Right now, more affluent neighborhoods provide for supplies out of the pocket, while poorer neighborhoods are highly stressed to do likewise. This disparity must be eliminated.

- Our children have an engaging curriculum that includes art, music social studies the sciences and vocational education;

The lack of such courses in the curriculum has truly been a human rights violation (the Rights of the Child Convention). Obviously, additional staff must be hired to make this curriculum possible. In particular, courses in environmental sciences/studies should be offered to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century, especially climate change. In addition to vocational education, apprenticeship programs for 21st century employment should be implemented in high school so that union jobs are guaranteed upon graduation.

- Children have access to wraparound services to meet their social, emotional and health needs.

Given the shockingly high child poverty rate impacting Black and Brown students these services must be made available. In addition, as required under the 2012 South Capitol Street Act, all schools should have a mental health professional, noting that the mayor and DC Council have failed to fully fund and implement this law. Starting with schools in high poverty areas, community schools should be established. But arguably the biggest impact that our Mayor/Council could make to improve school performance is the virtual elimination of the human rights violation of child poverty by raising TANF income support to the Federal Poverty Level, along with funding complementary programs. In addition, student homelessness must be eliminated, whose existence is documented in the State of Human Rights in the District of Columbia as a Human Rights City 2017 Update (<https://www.afsc.org/document/2017-dc-human-rights-city-report>).

- How will you ensure that there is funding for these policies?

As I testified to the DC Council, COW, on April 27, 2018, the DC Council has the clear responsibility to address two long standing egregious human rights violations in our community, namely child poverty and homelessness, and in doing so bringing DC closer to becoming a Human Rights City in reality, by tapping into the ample tax base of the wealthy, given DC's very high income inequality. Note that if the DC Council had acted to capture the federal income tax cut of wealthy residents (greater than \$200K income per by year) by raising their DC income tax rate for FY 2019 at least \$250 million additional revenue would have been generated, leaving these residents paying the same overall taxes as before. The Council will have another opportunity for FY 2020.

Funding for these policies as well as other long neglected budgetary priorities such as affordable housing can be achieved by progressive taxation, reduction followed by elimination of subsidies to gentrification and displacement (tax abatements etc.) and of course adjustment in the educational budget to reducing administrative costs and increasing the instructional and wraparound service funding.

- How will you ensure that the mayor enforces these policies in an equitable manner?

Critical for insuring equity are Council and Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) oversight with transparent access to budgets and school data and holding the Mayor fully accountable for enforcement, until such time the failed experiment of Mayoral control is ended, the sooner the better.

2. 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. But the fact remains that the city's achievement gap remains at an unacceptably high level.

In your opinion, why do you believe the achievement gap persists in Washington, DC?

DC has very high economic and racial disparities which are the legacy of neoliberal "trickle-down" economic policies of our local elected government following the agenda of the Federal City Council, the powerful lobby of big banks and the corporate developer sector, in particular, their so-called "education reform" program with the privatization and semi-privatization of public education.

What policies will you support to close the achievement gap?

Consistent with the best research and assessment by such scholars as Diane Ravitch, the biggest single impact that our Mayor/Council could make in the near future to closing the achievement gap is the elimination of the human rights violations of child poverty and homelessness, coupled with the provision of robust wraparound services. And of course, instruction must be shifted from "teaching to the test" to a comfortable and safe environment where critical thinking and creativity can flourish in the classroom.

How are you going to ensure transparency in the budgeting process and make certain school funds (like Title I, Special Education, English Language Learners, 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?

Transparent access to the school budget must be made user friendly to parents and teachers/WTU, online and in hardcopies, available in community centers and libraries with outreach using public service advertising on TV and radio. Community meetings should be organized to discuss the budget, and Council hearings should be held at times that maximize the chance of participation.

Would you support forensic accounting by the DC Auditor of DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools budgets to ensure the money is being spent in direct service to students? Why or why not?

Yes, the DC Auditor is already providing invaluable insight into the actual implementation of legally required policies. If more support staff and resources are needed they should be supplied.

DC Public and DC Public Charter Schools take on many large-scale initiatives in an attempt to address the achievement gap. One example is introducing models of computer-based “personalized learning” that include the purchasing and disbursement of large amounts of computer technology and purchasing expensive computer program licenses like Edgenuity.

How do you propose overseeing these funds and guaranteeing that they are being spent in an effective and equitable manner?

A central policy research office in the DC Council should be established, thereby removing the non-transparent Mayoral control of data generated by these existing initiatives, as well as making additional data available as needed for full evaluation of achievement gap programs, so that improvements can be made in their effectiveness. Again, this process must engage all those involved, the instructional staff, parents and students.

DC Public Schools also takes on a large number of initiatives in the local schools that require a lot of resources without providing additional funding. An example of this type of unfunded mandate is “LEAP,” a program that requires teachers to collaborate and engage in weekly professional development. On its surface, a program like this sounds good, but it has large time requirements, removes teachers from classrooms and led to higher class sizes for the remaining teachers without additional funding. Despite repeated requests DCPS has yet to provide additional funds for this program and is leading to teacher burnout and increased churn.

How will you oversee the implementation of DCPS initiatives and make sure that local schools are being adequately staffed and resourced to carry them out?

LEAP (LEarning together to Advance our Practice) is potentially a useful initiative but its implementation like other initiatives must occur with full respect for the time needed for first rate instruction. Hence, teachers/WTU must have real input into its implementation.

3. Testing and Accountability

Since *No Child Left Behind* was passed, and now under the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, 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?

Standardized testing is claimed to provide an objective assessment of student knowledge and learning but its over-reliance is a real problem, leading to “teaching to the test” rather than focusing on the real needs of students.

Who do you believe benefits from standardized testing, and how do they benefit?

Standardized testing at best can be used to provide a preliminary picture of student performance, and what additional instruction is needed. Given its limitations, and taking into account the impact of family income status and other important factors influencing student’s school performance, standardized test scores should not be used in a punitive way to close schools or remove staff as has been the common practice.

There are teachers who do not have access to their current students detailed PARCC Score breakdowns in math and English, which are important to informing instruction and students mastering the material. How will you help get teachers access to this data?

Their access should be required and this policy must be audited for implementation.

Do you believe teachers should be rated using test scores? Why or why not?

No! It should be obvious that the limitations of test scores already cited in previous answers must be recognized, in particular not taking into account the past challenges a student faced inside and outside of school, as well as the previous quality of instruction.

Will you advocate with the Mayor and OSSE to switch to Common Core-aligned adaptive tests over non-adaptive tests? Why or why not?

Yes, this switch would be a significant improvement in assessing student’s instructional needs.

4. Governance of our Public Schools

In 2007 the majority of the City Council supported the mayor in changing the governance structure of DC Public Schools. The School Board no longer would be in charge of hiring and overseeing a school Superintendent, putting all of that authority under the mayor. The mayor was also given the authority to hire a position titled “Chancellor.” In most jurisdictions, School Superintendents have to pass rigorous coursework in educational leadership, receive state certification and have experience in leading. Chancellors, on the other hand, do not have the same level of requirements. The WTU believes that under the system of Mayoral Control there are no longer adequate systems of checks and balances when it comes to the governance of our public schools.

Will you introduce and/or support legislation that returns the power of oversight and hiring of a superintendent for DC Public Schools to a duly elected school board? Why or why not?

I strongly agree with the WTU’s assessment of the failure of Mayoral Control, you are the experts, not me! The public record, e.g., the graduation of chronic truants speaks to validity of this assessment. Mayoral Control is a key component of the failed outcome of “education reform”. The process of bringing real transparency to the performance of existing practices with full and deep public engagement should greatly enhance the success of an elected school board.

Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) are required civic bodies within our schools that include is a group of elected and appointed members. The team (formerly the Local School Restructuring Teams) consists of parents, teachers, non-instructional school staff, a community member, and in some cases students, to advise the principal on matters that promote high expectations and high achievement for all students. The current implementation of LSATs has been wildly uneven throughout the District, with some schools having regular meetings and a principal who works with them, and others where the principal does not authentically engage. Under the current framework communities facing the latter are unable to do much about it, the “Advisory” being treated as such.

Will you introduce and/or support legislation that increases the power of the LSATs to empower parents, teachers and community within our local public schools? Why or why not?

Yes. This enhanced power must be coupled with full and transparent access to relevant data and should include the power to recommend and budgetary decisions.

In order to ensure accountability for our schools, will you support higher protections and additional oversight for whistleblowers who are then subject to retaliation?

Yes, this is not only a just policy but is imperative to make possible full accountability of institutions and their policy implementation.

Washington DC is one of the few jurisdictions where public school teachers are not allowed to run for public office. In 2012 President Obama signed a law that removed District Government employees from following the Federal Hatch Act, but the DC Council enacted a law to maintain the same principles.

Will you be willing to introduce and/or support an update to the 2010 Local Hatch Act that allows teachers to run for public office?

Yes. In the past a public school teacher representing the DC Statehood Green Party ran against Jack Evans for the Ward 2 seat, and as a result was the subject of retaliation. Supporting the right of DC teachers to run for public office is part of the struggle for full self-determination and DC Statehood. Shame on the DC Council for its cowardly action!

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, how will you support the WTU in being more included in the process?

As an elected Councilmember I will take immediate steps to transfer my salary to an organizing fund for DC organizations fighting for economic, social and environmental justice, and providing my office in the Wilson Building as a resource center for the same goal. The WTU obviously is such an organization. (Note that as Professor Emeritus, Howard University with over 40 years college teaching experience, I have an adequate pension and income from social security). Judge me by my record; see summary at my campaign website, https://dcsgp.nationbuilder.com/david_schwartzman.

6. Serving Exceptional Students

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?

I will fight hard for funding for adequate staffing, and of course participate in oversight of the performance record and budgetary proposal of the Mayor to generate the Council's budget. The District government must be held fully accountable for its atrocious record with respect to serving exceptional students. Again, this issue is one of fulfilling DC's commitment as a Human Rights City. Charter schools in particular must provide transparent records of performance in this regard, and I will support legislation as necessary to make this possible. The OSSE must also be held accountable for its responsibility for the delivery and quality control for special education services.

English Language Learners (ELL) require additional support in order to thrive in our schools. Currently too many of our schools are facing challenges adequately staffing these positions.

How will you ensure that our ELL students receive more robust and flexible resources and support?

Just as with the case of exceptional student needs I will fight hard for necessary funding for adequate staffing, participate in oversight of the performance record and budgetary proposal of the Mayor to generate the Council's budget. DCPS's targeted budget must go to meet these needs.

Will you support guaranteeing that heritage language speakers be given priority for dual language programs? Why or why not?

Yes, dual language programs should serve English speakers trying to learn a new language, with a priority given to heritage language speakers to give them the opportunity to learn in a language that is part of their cultural heritage.

Will you support the pending Language Access Bill and ensure that DCPS and Charter Schools enforce it? Why or why not?

Yes, this is vitally important legislation but like any legislation oversight and monitoring will be imperative for its full and timely implementation.

When schools receive a large amount of funds that are directed towards specific student populations (i.e., Special Education, English Language Learner, At-Risk) they are often finding that these funds are being used to *supplant* their general education funds instead of *supplementing* them. On the surface, it appears these schools are getting additional funding compared with schools that do not serve high levels of these populations. But, when broken down it is often apparent that these schools are receiving less general education funds than those other schools.

How will you ensure that specialty funds are not used to supplant local school budgets and our students get the fair funding they deserve?

This misuse of budgeted targeted funding is unfortunately a common practice. Hence, I will work with WTU to raise the required questions in the budget oversight hearings as well as introducing legislation as needed to make sure these funds are used to supplement general education funding.

7. Holding All Schools Accountable

What is the role of charter schools in D.C.? Do you believe they are adequately fulfilling that role?

Charter school establishment has resulted in a systematic erosion of the public school system, a key component of the failed "education reform" program so enthusiastically promoted by the Federal City Council and its mouthpieces such as the Washington Post. Yes, charter schools have fulfilled that role, but not as a service to the educational needs of DC's children. If made fully accountable to our elected government, these schools could serve the public, but not as a replacement of DCPS which should be

strengthened once again becoming the dominant school choice. By the way, my younger son, now 35, received an excellent education in DCPS (Ross Elementary, Deal and Wilson).

How will you ensure that charter schools are meeting the same requirements as traditional public schools, particularly as they relate to access for all students (i.e., special education and ELL)?

Absolutely. Public charter schools should be held to the same requirements as traditional public schools! The District should set well-defined standards for reaching the most important educational objectives as well as be making charter schools required to have a language access coordinator for students who need them and be prohibited from suspending of students before high school.

Do you believe that charter schools should be allowed to hire unlicensed teachers? Why or why not?

Like DCPS, public charter schools should be able to hire unlicensed teachers on a probationary basis, with requirements that they complete teacher licensing within a well-defined and enforced amount of time.

Should charter school teachers have the right to organize and join a union? Why or why not?

Yes, and I will use the resources of my office to promote this organization. Union rights are human rights!

If elected, will you introduce and/or support legislation requiring charter schools to follow the same FOIA request laws as DC Public Schools? Why or why not?

Yes, I am fully committed to this objective.

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?

This practice has been used to boost the test scores reported as evidence of their success in comparison to DCPS, and must be terminated, holding charters to the same requirements as DCPS. Follow up audits are likely needed to make sure this problem is resolved.

8. 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?

Just as Jeremiah Lowery has championed, I fully support fully funded universal high-quality childcare for

all parents and will introduce/support legislation to implement this objective with OSSE leadership.

Achievement gaps begin before a student enters school in pre-K requiring extensive differentiation and scaffolding by the teacher to make sure all students are successful at mastering the material for their grade-level. How will you ensure that student-to-teacher ratios are low enough for our schools to be successful?

Needed staffing must be recruited and funded to make possible the optimal student-to-teacher ratio necessary for first rate education. Of course I will work with WTU to make this a reality.

9. 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, every year nearly \$2 million of tax payer funds are spent by the district on early retirement and cash buyout options, leading to the perpetual separation of effective teachers and rehiring and training of new teachers.

Teachers in D.C. lost the right to bargain on teacher evaluation in 1997, and this loss means teachers' voices no longer matter in an area highly pivotal to their professional growth, career advancement and effectiveness.

As Councilmember, will you support the WTU in lobbying efforts with Congress to return the right to collectively bargain on teacher evaluation? If so, how?

Yes. This objective is an essential part of our struggle for full self-determination and DC Statehood. I will use the resources of my office, including my personal participation in lobbying Congress to achieve this.

How will you advocate with the mayor to change the current teacher evaluation policy so that teachers are supported in improving their practice, and not simply terminated after a single year due to a sometimes flawed and highly subjective evaluation system?

Yes. I am well aware of the egregious violations of teachers' rights under the system of Mayoral Control. I will work in collaboration with WTU to change the current teacher evaluation policy.

How will you help redress those who are evaluated and terminated wrongfully?

Establishing a labor management review board with an elected school board is a necessary step for redress. An appeal process must be implemented now.

Do you believe teacher churn is a problem? If so, how will you work to reduce teacher churn?

Teacher churn is their movement within their schools to a new grade-level assignment or a new subject. According to recent studies, these reassignments can depress their students' achievement. Necessary increase in staffing to ensure continuity in teaching is imperative. So is a comprehensive program of support for teaching staff.

10. Summary

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

1. Universal Pre-K, but because of inadequate outreach this program is not fully utilized.
2. Community schools, which should be fully supported and expanded.
3. Afterschool programs, which should be enriched in creative directions, e.g., field trips to Rock Creek Park and Great Falls National Park, environmental justice and science experiences.

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

1. Child poverty and homelessness: see my answers to “In your opinion, why do you believe the achievement gap persists in Washington, DC?” and “What policies will you support to close the achievement gap?”
2. Funding: see my answer to “How will you ensure that there is funding for these policies?”
3. Transparency, accountability, meaningful participation by teachers, parents and students and of course the failure of “education reform”/Mayoral Control : see answers to previous questions.

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

Please see my answer to “Specifically, how will you support the WTU in being more included in the process?”. More specifically, my legislative director will work closely with WTU, guaranteeing direct access to me and my staff. In addition, I will work with WTU to implement their budgetary priorities for the next fiscal year.