

PA-PAC Questionnaire for Durham Public School

Board of Education 2018

*When answering this questionnaire, please repeat the questions in your response document with their numbers as they are organized here. Type your responses in italics or a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. Thank you for your participation! **Total number of pages should be limited to 10, including the questions. Please use at least 11 point font.***

Please return completed form along with your resume describing education, work history, community service and prior political experience AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, but by **March 09, 2018 at the latest**

Email responses to chrismbriggs@gmail.com

Please note that following above deadline, the Durham People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and your willingness to serve the people of Durham.

Candidate Name: Matt Sears

Address: 1505 Blount St. Durham, NC 27707

E-mail address: mattmsears@gmail.com

Phone: 919-389-1867

I am running for District Seat 3

School Board

1. Why do you want to serve on the Durham Public School Board of Education? What is the role of a board member?

I want to continue to serve on the Board of Education so that I can continue to push DPS toward greater community accountability for student performance, professionalism, and the proper execution of financial resources that are directed at improving student performance.

The role of a Board member, in my opinion, is to be a well-informed member of the citizenry around the topics of local, state, national, and international education, policy making, and how local, state and federal resources support local education.

Literally, the role of a Board member is to supervise (and hire/fire) the superintendent and to set and execute district policy, including hearing grievances and personnel matters.

2. In what ways do you see yourself and the school board interacting with the superintendent?

I meet regularly with the superintendent to ask for updates on long-range issues that may not surface in work session meetings month to month. I forward constituent concerns to the superintendent. I work with the Board to set the evaluation process with the superintendent then complete an evaluation of the superintendent annually along with a face-to-face follow-up to discuss the evaluation.

What do you think the most important issues are to hold the superintendent accountable around?

- 1. Are more and more students reading at grade level? In the short term: is our improvement outpacing our peers? We are currently around 95th in terms of performance...are we getting better? Long term: are we reaching the 70%, 80%, 90%, 100% goals that we really want for the children in our community?**
- 2. Do Teacher Working Conditions and 360 degree assessments show that we are trending toward that notion of "53 great leaders for 53 schools?"**
- 3. Is our teacher retention rate improving?**
- 4. Does the community feel the superintendent and his team are available and responsive to community needs?**

If as a school board member, problems in a school come to your attention, what steps have you taken or would you take to resolve them?

I send these concerns on to the administration. Sometimes I will ask that they formulate a response for me so that I may be informed of their position. Rarely (1 out of 100 or less), I will ask to hear more personally about the issue, but usually only if I feel it may relate to the superintendent's performance. This must be done only rarely for if the issue leads to a grievance, I would have to recuse myself from hearing that grievance.

3. How should teachers and administrators be evaluated? Are the current state standards effective?

No, they are not effective and are even less so now that there are student scores at play and bonuses around student scores being awarded. Teacher and administrators should be evaluated using a 360-degree assessment, where students, families, teachers, peers, and supervisors all supply information that forms a picture of their work. Supervisors need to be truly expert coaches and mentors that both evaluate their reports and help them develop.

4. How should students be assessed? What role should standardized tests play in evaluating students? How do you feel about the new superintendent's approach to testing?

Largely, in their current form, standardized tests show us if a child can “do school” as we currently imagine it. We learn if the myriad scaffolds we put in place starting when they are 5 years-old can chip away at potential inequities that children experience both before and during their school years. And largely we see that, “no,” we can’t overcome poverty, racism, mental and physical health challenges, all of which often manifest as something akin to post-traumatic stress in MANY of our students. These tests tell us year after year that what we can do, in the time we have with these kids, and the resources we can bring to bear, can’t overcome those inequities. And yet, there is the pure academic element that we need to look at while teasing out that greater truth: can our kids read and read at grade level? While we can debate if standardized tests can do that effectively or not, these are one way to help us answer that question and we have a responsibility to answer it and to work on improving their ability to read.

It is too early for me to tell how I feel about the new superintendent's approach to testing. Our students deserve very much to be performing better than 95th of 115 districts. But I will continue to ask myself and our community if we are willing to sacrifice any of our values in order to become the 75th, 50th, 25th performing district in NC.

5. Durham Public Schools have become increasingly segregated by socioeconomic status and race. What are your thoughts on this situation?

Redistricting to ease overcrowding and to potentially look at socioeconomic parity is long overdue. I am promising to work hard to complete a redistricting plan by 2022 if re-elected. And, please see question 7 but note that our own magnet programs also sometimes support this notion of parents running from their neighborhood schools.

6. Recent data has suggested that, despite the programming implemented to decrease suspensions in DPS, the numbers of suspensions in some of our schools continues to rise at concerning rates. It is also clear that suspensions disproportionately affect black and brown male students. What do you think the district should do to address this issue?

When the US Dept of Ed's Office of Civil Rights complaint emerged in 2014, I joined the board in time for Dr. Jacob Vigdor's report that showed that within DPS schools, suspensions were given out fairly evenly in terms of offense = consequence. There were two challenges: 1. Rates of suspension between schools was extremely different, with some schools suspending many and others none. And 2. that the suspension data of then and today does not get into the culture of a school's decision making around what referrals rise up to consequences and that there may be disparities in those decisions.

All that said, I see this most recent data as just one data point and too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of programs like Capturing Kids Hearts.

Finally, irrespective of the most recent data or that of the Vigdor report, I feel from my experience in DPS that I know that principal training is needed to norm our district to be consistent from school to school, from consequence to consequence. I do not think our principals know how to do this through their certification programs and that it is has not been a focus of their district support. Further, teachers need training on everything from de-escalation to racial equity to restorative justice to keep as much control of discipline in their classrooms.

In this past year's data I see a set of principals that are armed with too few tools to overcome the default tool of suspension.

7. What is your opinion about the Charter School movement in NC, especially in Durham?

The bill in 2011 to lift the cap of the number of charters schools has been devastating to public education. Because communities can now pop up charters schools on a whim, we are seeing many (but not all) charters not be “petri dishes of innovation” (and I would argue that few were before 2011 as was the original intent of charter legislation) but rather places of institutionalized racism in our community--places for parents running from neighborhood schools that don't match parents' ideas of what is best for their child, and what's best for their child is not to be around poor kids and large numbers of kids of color.

When asked how DPS should relate to charter schools, my response is: Learn from them where we can, share what we know with everyone (not just charters).

8. As a board member how would you address the needs of the students who are at risk for low achievement and leaving high school before graduation? How do you see yourself working on this as a district-wide issue?

Please see question 4 and know that like most everyone else will tell you, I believe our students can learn. I do believe we can get them a quality education in 13 years of instruction with enough wrap-around services like preK, physical and mental health care, and by better preparing our teachers and principals to meet their academic and behavioral needs. We should continue to adopt new tactics like racial equity institutes and creating communities where authority figures have common cultures with students. And we've thrown millions and millions of dollars at programs like Positive Behavior, Responsive Classrooms, Capturing Kids Hearts, etc. AND, what we really need (yes, it is a dream for now) is an education system that treats kids more like individuals by knowing them, meeting their individual needs and not treating them like inputs/outputs of a factory model education.

9. Why do you think that parents choose to take their children out of the public schools in Durham or don't choose them at all? How would you address this issue?

Please see questions 5 and 7. I push our district leadership to have better performance at our schools as a strategy. Marketing and other tactics may draw more families in, but the quality of education is the best driver to change reputation and make families stay. That said, I am not convinced DPS can help overcome the racism behind many of these choices.

10. If you could do three things to improve Durham Public Schools, what would they be?

- 1. Improving reading performance without testing our students ad nauseam. In the end, we want students that know what they need to know to be successful. Less than 80%, 90%, 100% shouldn't be okay with any of us.**
- 2. 53 great leaders for 53 schools, with a pipeline and transition plans that don't leave schools' quality vacillating every time a principal changes roles. Principals are the greatest influencer of quality teachers coming and staying in our district.**
- 3. Dismantle racism in our community and staff (yeah...I know this is a ridiculous statement, but it is how I feel). Community: If we had the resources of the privileged that do not opt into DPS, we could do so much more for our public schools. Staff: If we had all educators that better understood their students and worked against their biases to support all students, we would have better outcomes.**

11. What is your position about the state class size mandate for grades k-3? If it passes, should DPS adopt the legislation financially and logistically?

The bill introduced in the last month has two poisoned provisions attached that may kill the entire bill and so the recent adoption of the "fix" may be thrown out by courts quite soon which would revert us back to needing an additional \$6M in personnel costs to meet the requirements of the original legislation.

I expect our district to look at all options for ensuring that our students have reasonable space to learn and grow, that teachers are still treated as professionals in their amount of work space, but also ensuring that our state funding is not jeopardized.

That said, I continue to be open to challenging legislation that hurts our children and as this law is rolled out over the years, it is becoming more and more clear that it is hurting Durham's schools and students.

12. If you are an incumbent, what are the three things that have happened during your term that you are the most proud of? If you are a new candidate, what are three positive things that you have observed happening in DPS?

- 1. I have built a strong working relationship with the Durham Association of Educators (DAE). Our community is better because of the investment of their time and energy in the work of schools and the district. They better prepare me to lead initiatives of mutual benefit and I believe that a strong teacher voice in the community can only help us better meet the needs of the students they work with daily.**
- 2. When our former superintendent resigned in the spring of 2017, I fought very, very hard to ensure an open search for a new superintendent was conducted. While internal candidates were welcome to apply in my opinion, I fought to make sure they would have to compete for the role so that Durham would get the very best candidate based on total merit, not simply longevity.**
- 3. I have challenged the DPS status quo consistently over my four years. From ensuring that evaluations of top leadership were completed annually, to challenging the academic spending that frequently was not timely nor based on the needs of teachers, and occasionally challenging the personnel reports that I think too often were biased toward a way of doing business that has led to DPS being ranked the 95th performing district out of 115 for far too long rather than the merits of the candidates.**

13. What do you think is a reasonable and realistic pathway and timeline for achieving universal pre-k for four-year-old children in Durham?

Given the current class-size chaos, the clear path of adding preK to our buildings is now clouded as is the timeline. I would like to see additional centers like Whitted added to other parts of the counties, but really I would like to see school start at age 4 in preK at each of our 30 elementary schools.

In the interim, all options are on the table to me: partnerships with current providers, centers that DPS creates before/during/after a redistricting to consolidate students in under-enrolled schools, adding preK to existing buildings.

14. The School Board will be asking our board of county commissioners for local funds for DPS this spring. What is your top priority for increased funding? Do you see places for realizing savings in the current budget?

A top priority is to ensure that DPS continues to see an equitable share of any increased revenues generated by Durham's current prosperity. Traditionally that has been about 1/3.

Secondly, and something that is traditionally out of the public eye, is a need to shift our capital needs out of bonds. Our district upkeep needs range annually from \$2M-\$5M and the notion of putting these items into a bond is irresponsible and does not allow for the continual upkeep of our capital investments. Put plainly, carpet replacement and paint shouldn't be in bonds. The discussions on this issue need to be ongoing and will not likely rise to our annual request from

the county, but I do need the community to be aware that this is a shift that needs to happen and that we may need community support on.

Finally, beyond annual increases in personnel and benefits, this is likely the year to square our investment in classified employees, and not just custodians. We will need to look at investing in DPS custodians rather than outsourcing and that will carry a cost, but in considering these workers, there are many others that are paid far below what we would consider a living wage. An example are our before/after school care workers. A comprehensive look at classified salaries and schedules may necessitate us prioritizing classified employees' needs in our ask of the county.

Personal Information

15. Please describe your educational background (skip if resume included)

Resume attached

16. Do you have children? If so, where do they, or did they, attend school?

Yes!

Marisol: currently a 2nd grader at Lakewood Elementary School

Greta: currently in preK at the Whitted School and will attend Lakewood Elementary next year

Dean: 2.5 years-old

17. Please describe your adult employment history (skip if resume included)

Resume attached

MATT M. SEARS

EXPERIENCE

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, DUKE UNIVERSITY TALENT IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM, DURHAM, NC — 2017-PRESENT

- Provides strategic leadership of the face-to-face educational programs division, with approximately \$24 million in budgetary oversight
- Maintains positive, collaborative relationships across Duke TIP divisions and University departments to coordinate the deadlines and workflows that various programs use to implement program operations

CONSULTANT, EDUCATIONAL DESIGNER, SELF-EMPLOYED, DURHAM, NC — 2016

- Designer of Project Based Learning, high quality Mathematics classrooms, and provider of professional development and coaching services, including Mathematics Design Collaborative implementation with Matchbook Learning at schools in Newark, NJ and Detroit, MI

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL E-LEARNING, NORTH CAROLINA NEW SCHOOLS, RALEIGH, NC — 2015-2016

- Led team to design virtual coaching experiences for more than 150 schools across North Carolina and SC, MS, IL, IN
- Developed virtual and blended (face-to-face with virtual) professional learning for adult learners
- Led team that researched, analyzed, and implemented Learning Management System (LMS) with 5,000 clients

DIRECTOR, SCHOOL SERVICES, NORTH CAROLINA NEW SCHOOLS, RALEIGH, NC — 2011-2015

- Developed and led professional learning and coaching for principals, teachers, and district leaders
- Led School Support Teams in more than 60 schools including 20 Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) schools
- Developed and supported learning technology advancements within organization and with clients
- Developed and led cross-functional teams to improve internal operations and service quality
- Professional Learning delivered included: Secondary Lenses on Learning (mathematics), Math Design Collaborative (MDC), Engineering Design and Project-Based Learning

MEMBER, DURHAM COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION, DURHAM, NC — 2014-PRESENT

- \$420M budget, 8th largest district in NC
- Organizing campaigns for neighborhood schools, universal pre-k, and zero-based budgeting
- Leading desegregation efforts

EDUCATORS' DESIGN NETWORK FELLOWSHIP, WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS, RALEIGH, NC — 2013-2014

- Researched current and emerging models of blended learning: Charter schools applications (Rocketship, etc.), Public Impact (L.I.F.T), etc. and presented recommendations for potential inclusion in school models

MATHEMATICS TEACHER, HILLSIDE NEW TECH HIGH SCHOOL, DURHAM, NC — 2007-2010

- Developed and implemented Project Based Learning (PBL) units for Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, Pre-Calculus, AP Computer Science and “iPhone Programming”
- Mentored pre-service teachers from Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill

FULBRIGHT TEACHER EXCHANGE, KV SULUR, TAMIL NADU, INDIA — AUGUST 10, 2008 - DECEMBER 20, 2008

- Taught mathematics courses to 6th - 9th grade students using India’s CBSE Math curriculum

CONSULTANT, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL, NC — 2006-2008

- Facilitated discussions with pre-service teachers on how to bridge the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practice in Masters level courses EDUC 245 and EDUC 247

MATHEMATICS TEACHER, HILLSIDE HIGH SCHOOL, DURHAM, NC — 2004-2007

GRANT SUPPORT SPECIALIST, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL, NC — 2002-2003

- Supported/developed grant applications for faculty in the Physics Department

EDUCATION

- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC — Masters of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.), 2004
Concentration: Secondary Mathematics
- Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN — Bachelor of Science (B.S.), 2002
Major: Mathematics with a Specialization in Computer Science Minor: Spanish

LICENSURES AND CERTIFICATIONS

- Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) 360-degree Assessment Certification
- North Carolina (SP2) Professional Educator’s License - 6-12 Mathematics HQ 85 (2004-2017)
- National Boards Certification (NBCT) in Adolescence and Young Adulthood/Mathematics (2009-2019)
- Google Certified Teacher (GCT) via Google Teachers Academy in Washington DC, 2009

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

- Durham County, NC, Board of Education, 2014-present
- Board of Advisors, the Kenan Fellows Program, NC State University 2011-2015
- Contributor to Business Planning Committee for the Buck Institute for Education, 2012
- Graduate: Durham Neighborhood College 2007

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2011 Excellence in Teaching Award - UNC School of Education Alumni Awards
- Career Award in Science and Math from Burroughs Wellcome Fund, April 2010. \$175,000 over 5 year period
- 2009 Excite Award from Lemelson-MIT Program, 2009
- 2008-2009 Durham Public Schools Teacher of the Year
- 2007-2008 Teacher of the Year - Hillside New Tech High School
- 2006 AAER Research Fellow for Annual Conference

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- Lemelson-MIT InvenTeam Grant
- Alumni Fellowship in Kenan Fellows Program at North Carolina State University. April 2009-2010
- 2008 Fulbright Teacher Exchange Grant. Spent four months teaching secondary math in south India.
- \$20,100 Innovation Generation Grant from the Motorola Foundation for Podcasting STEM project, 2007.
- 2006 Kenan Fellow

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

- Holmes, Shawn, Brandi Thurmond, Leonard A. Annetta and Matthew Sears. "Serious Educational Games (SEGs) and Student Learning and Engagement with Scientific Concepts." Cases on Inquiry through Instructional Technology in Math and Science. IGI Global, 2012. 464-486. Web. 7 Apr. 2012. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-0068-3.ch017
- National Science Foundation (NSF) Grant with Dr. Leonard Annetta aimed at having students create video games that disseminate current university research in science: titled GRADUATE Project
- National Science Foundation (NSF) Grant No. 0525115, developing video games for classrooms that engage students in science and mathematics: HI FIVES Project under Dr. Leonard Annetta of NC State University. Developed video games that address Algebra 1 curriculum and tested games with students in the classroom. 2006-08