

Peoples Alliance-PAC Questionnaire for Durham

Board of Education 2020

Please return completed form along with your resume describing education, work history, community service and prior political experience AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, but by **Dec. 27, 2019 at the latest. We intend to interview candidates on Jan. 4, 2020. We will be in touch with details about place and time.**

Email responses to page.mc@frontier.com and to tom-miller1@nc.rr.com

Please note that following above deadline, the 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: ____Jovonia Lewis____

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Phone: __919-353-3655_____

Candidate for District: ____consolidated district A_____

When answering this questionnaire, you may repeat the questions in your response document with their numbers as they are organized here or simply use this document to respond. Type your responses in a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. PLEASE LIMIT YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH QUESTION TO 200 WORDS OR LESS. Thank you for your participation.

1. What do you think is the most pressing issue facing public K-12 education in Durham? How have you been involved in addressing that issue, and how will you continue to address that issue as a board member?

The most pressing issue facing public K-12 education in Durham is the disparity in academic success and discipline data. My heart for education and empowerment led me to create a parent collective working for equity in the school system, Parents of African American Children – Durham (PAAC – Durham). In its first year of inception, the PAAC at my son's school had the greatest academic growth in the District. I began creating structures to support parents around the county, and in less than 3 years, 1/3 of the schools in the District have PAACs. This work also includes me

giving leadership to parent workshops focused on affecting change at the District-level.

As a board member, I would address these disparities, by keeping a narrow focus on educating the whole child, engaging the family and community, supporting wrap around services and student support services with additional resources and making sure the right resources are provided for all children. We need to keep the focus on strong leadership in every school, teacher's ability to educate students and manage classrooms and growing our student populations. We also need to address academic rigor and access to advanced classes for all our students.

2. Pre-K: What is your vision for Universal Pre-K in Durham? Please include measurable goals and a timeline for expansion. Describe your understanding of DPS's role as a partner in this process.

My vision for Universal Pre-K in Durham is that every school would offer high quality Pre-K for students so that there is better opportunity for children to enter Kindergarten fully prepared and on a more level playing field. Given the current class-size chaos, the path to adding Pre-K in Durham Public Schools is unclear in regard to a timeline. Presently, it would also be beneficial to see additional centers like the Whitted School across the county. The Whitted School has seen success with a community approach used to re-purpose the building, integrate generational connections and intentionally reach out to students in low income neighborhoods to support their preparation for Kindergarten.

In the interim, I am open to reasonable solutions to bring this much needed service to our children. Solutions such as partnerships with current providers, centers that DPS creates before/during/after a redistricting to consolidate students in under-enrolled schools, adding pre-K to existing buildings. My understanding of DPS's role as a partner in the process is one of collaboration and support. DPS should also push staff for collaboration and align our professional development with theirs.

3. As a school board member, would you vote for a board resolution and lobby state legislators for a moratorium on approving more charters in NC and for allowing a pilot program for charters to become part DPS? Why or why not?

The charter school movement in NC, especially in Durham has contributed to the re-segregation of schools. Its intent is not being used for what it was created and that is costing traditional public schools in resources, and negatively affecting our students who are displaced from a charter school back to their traditional school. I would support a board resolution for a moratorium on approving charters in NC. Durham has had the greatest growth of charter schools since the city and county merger in 1992. From my research, a majority of the charter schools have not fulfilled the commitments to have established a charter; they have not shown academic success

for all students any differently than the public schools; and in some cases, they increase segregation in the schools.

A pilot program for charters to become part of DPS seems to model the Restart programs, which I would support. However, I would need more information on the organization structure and a transition plan to consider supporting that pilot programs for charters to become a part of DPS allowing the pilot programs for charters to become part of DPS.

4. DPS now has four schools operating under a community schools model. Describe what “community schools model” means? Do you think DPS should fund community schools expansion? Why or why not?

A “community schools’ model” is an approach to implement evidence-based strategy to bring together the resources of schools, families and communities. The model with which I’m familiar boasts shared power in decision making and connecting to families and communities. It is an aspirational goal to develop this model of leadership and community engagement, and this type of engagement is needed and should be at every school. There are a few different models being explored at DPS including restorative practices, capturing kids’ hearts, and various magnet school themes. DPS should evaluate and explore all the school models being used and create a plan of action for the needs in the District.

5. What percentage of DPS students are Latinx (described in NC public school data as “Hispanic”)? Describe ways that DPS can better recruit and retain Latinx principals, teachers and other school staff. What other supports do our Latinx students need and how can we fund those needs?

32.8% of DPS students are Latinx. Our Latinx students need equitable and quality education, including wraparound services and support for the whole child. Also, DPS needs to work on better engagement of Latinx services around translation and interpretation, knowing that these students now comprise almost a third of our population.

It is ultimately the role of HR to recruit and retain personnel, and it is important that the Governor is taking action to also support diversity in teaching staff in NC. As a Board member, I will ensure the suggestions offered by HR is supported by race equity research and will be inclusive of best practices to keep academic success at the center. I would support recommendations similar to those listed below:

- Collaborate with HBCU’s.
- Seek LatinX teachers from programs abroad.
- Creating a culture and climate in a school that is supportive of teachers of color.
- Creating teaching assistant program supported through time and funding resources.

- A pilot summer program for high school students introducing them to teaching as an option and providing incentives for coming back to DPS.
- Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy.

6. What is restorative justice as practiced in Durham public schools? What is your assessment of how DPS is doing in rolling out restorative justice practice in our schools?

Restorative practices in DPS is an approach that the District is utilizing to address the whole child's development being inclusive of their social emotional health when behavioral challenges occur. In using a restorative approach opposed to punitive approach to discipline, the intention is that a student will learn and grow from their behaviors and/or actions.

Funding has been utilized to employ and train restorative coaches in every middle and high school. There has also been discussion that every Principal and teaching staff will also receive restorative practice training. However, when given this information, there was no clear timeline of when these trainings would occur. Parents/guardians and community who support the schools need more transparency. And, there was no clear delineation where accountability lies when a school has not implemented this practice as instructed by the District.

Also, in conjunction with the restorative justice training, we need to know the plan for anti-bias education training. Although there is a resource being implemented to address the whole child, if there is still an over-representation of Black and brown students being referred to restorative practice centers then it continues to perpetuate inequities in rule enforcement and practice.

7. Do you think Durham should have School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools? If not, please explain why not. If so, what do you think their role should be? What is your assessment of the MOU between the sheriff and DPS?

I think before making an all or none statement around SRO's being in Durham schools, there needs to be better clarity around the role of SRO's. Research supports that the presence of SRO's increases the likelihood of students increased contact in the juvenile system and increasing the school to prison pipeline. However, in meeting with some parents and teachers in Durham, there has been hesitation in supporting "No SRO's". To bridge understanding between parents, teachers and the community at large I would propose the following:

1. Clearly define the SRO role in the MOU.
2. DPS partnering with the community to hold forums to bridge understanding about SRO's and creating holistic safety for our students.
3. Once a commitment is made, a plan needs to be created that supports the community understanding and closing the school to prison pipeline from Durham.

The current MOU between the sheriff and DPS has been updated this year for the first time in over 10 years. This current MOU is better than the previous one, but there is room for improvement particularly around the type of training.

8. What is your plan for reducing racial disparities in suspensions in DPS?

To the detriment of Black and brown students, they are disproportionately suspended throughout the nation, and these suspensions fuel the school to prison pipeline. I am interested in introducing policy that creates more transparency that the District is addressing the issues that lead to these disparities. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure that these practices are implemented with fidelity. As part of PAAC-Durham's work, we asked the district for resources to document student work that is to be completed during suspension days so that those days are not void of learning. I am pleased to see that DPS has developed the appropriate documentation and look forward to working with the district on implementing the use of this form.

To reduce racial disparities in suspension in DPS it would also be important to implement research-based approaches to create equity. There needs to be an evaluation of the implementation of the 2017 revised student code of conduct and analysis of its implementation where there are disparities being created. Also, a plan needs to be created for individual schools that do not meet the DPS strategic plan benchmarks in reducing suspensions.

9. Do you support the Board of County Commissioners providing a recurring building maintenance fund for DPS properties? If not, why not. If so, what kind of formula would you use to calculate the yearly amount?

As building need yearly updates based on typical wear and tear, it would be important to have recurring building maintenance fund. In regard to where the funds are taken from, as a Board member, I would rely on the operations staff to assess and make recommendations for the Board members to consider. I would entrust the staff to create a formula based on District needs as a whole to calculate a yearly amount needed for recurring building maintenance needs.

10. If you are a current board member, describe the process you used this past year to evaluate the Superintendent and comment on whether you think it is effective in getting honest feedback from parents, teachers and principals. If you are a new candidate, what kind of evaluation of the superintendent would you like to use? How would you ensure that you got honest feedback from principals, teachers and parents?

The Superintendent should be evaluated by the School Board, and a part of his/her evaluation should take into consideration Principal, teacher and public feedback. The most important issues to hold the superintendent accountable around are (1)

creating a District culture that is reducing disparities between student sub-groups; (2) giving leadership to a team that increases access and choice for students for their future; (3) increasing teacher retention supported by Teacher Working Condition surveys and (4) increasing collaborative relationship within the District to support the community engagement and fiscal resources.

I would ensure that we got honest feedback from principals, teachers and parents through an anonymous feedback system. The evaluation should be a collaboration between personnel and employee through a two-way conversation.

11. What is your current involvement in and personal work regarding using a race equity lens in making decisions? If you are a current board member, please offer an example from board decision-making. If new candidate, please offer an example from a personal or professional experience.

My current involvement in and personal work regarding race equity lens in making decisions is exemplified in the non-profit that I created to support the work of PAAC.

The mission of Empowered Parents in Community, EPiC, is to dismantle systemic racial inequities through collective organizing and intentional engagement of parents/guardians and communities. We advocate for high quality educational opportunities and equitable distribution of resources. Our areas of prioritization are 1. closing the opportunity gap with the focus on decreasing disparities, and 2. increasing opportunities for marginalized communities.

Through our PAAC initiatives we have achieved greater engagement of marginalized parents in school leadership. We have advocated for culturally responsive education, racial equity training in the schools, increasing culturally responsive pedagogy and resources within a local school, and increasing access into honors classes. We have also brought attention to discipline disparities in several schools. In under 3 years, we have launched PAAC initiatives in one third of Durham Public Schools.

12. What is your knowledge about the current issues regarding school under-enrollment and overcrowding and your perspective on what principles should guide redistricting?

School under-enrollment and overcrowding is being addressed by our current DPS Board and administration through a consultant who came in to do a District analysis of current school enrollment and projections. Some of the under-enrollment has to do with charter school locations. Some immediate needs such as the overcrowding at Githens and under-enrollment at Brogden has called for more immediate action to be taken while the District reassignments are being reviewed.

From my perspective, the principles used to guide redistricting should be quality education at every school, re-balancing schools based on socio economic status and equity in decisions to support conveniences for all families.

13. Is local operational funding of our schools too high, about right, or too low? Please explain your response.

Comparatively, our local funding is high in relation to other local municipalities with similar data sets. However, in relation to funding in the county and prioritization, our current funding is too low. We need school funding for construction of new buildings and the infrastructure of the current schools. We have schools that are in desperate need of repairs and over-crowding in which trailers have been added to the school grounds. As an outlook for the needs in Durham, we must invest in our children which will yield the greatest return for the child and our community.

Personal Information:

1. Please describe your educational background, noting any degrees and honors you have earned. (Skip if resume included)

Resume Included

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

Yes. 2 at Lakewood Elementary School and 1 at Rogers Herr Middle School.

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

Resume included