**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; Please answer concisely if possible. 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](mailto: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:\_\_\_\_\_ Xavier L. Cason\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Candidate for District: \_\_\_\_DPS Board of Education, Consolidated District B\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*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?

I believe that our efforts to provide, affordable, equitable access to quality early education is key to the advancement of K-12 education in Durham. Immediately after attending the presentation of the 2017 Durham County State of Young Children Report, I have continued to serve on three different committees/task forces that directly supporting county efforts in that arena.

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.

Following the 2017 Durham County State of Young Children report, there has been an intentional collaboration underway to expand Pre-K awareness, capacity, commitment to equity, and enrollment. The 2019 launch of a truly universal Pre-K website is the result of several local government, community, and private entities who have done three things well so far: engaged with parents, engaged in tough conversations about best practices and community values, and clarified local standards for what quality Pre-K looks like in Durham. Over the next 10 years, I expect that we will see marked improvements in Pre-K teacher salaries while increasing the number of affordable Pre-K classrooms in the private sector, and low-or no-cost options within DPS.

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?

Yes, I would support a moratorium on approving more charters in NC. While the rapid growth of charters in the state may seem like a measure of success for some, I would point out that the original stated mission of charters in North Carolina was to create ‘laboratory’ schools in which innovations could be implemented, evaluated, and shared with traditional public schools. There is little to no such sharing between our school systems, particularly with schools that are managed by outside private agencies.

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?

The community schools model is one that recognizes the vast resources that exist among the school staff, parents, and community-at-large. The continuous-improvement framework that guides Durham Public Schools’ community schools is one that brings all stakeholders to the table in ways that the traditional Site-Based Management teams of the past never truly did. I have to tip my hat to the principals and community school coordinators who have partnered in a refreshing way to get the model not just off the ground but thriving. Expanding community schools in DPS is absolutely a worthy goal, but unlike NC’s approach to charter growth, any expansion must be carefully planned with community input.

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?

33% of Durham Public Schools’ students are listed in the NC DPI data as ‘Hispanic’ or Latinx. As research on student achievement makes the case for the potential positive impact that teachers of color can have on students of color, it is important that a priority be made to increase the number of Latinx teachers and administrators in DPS. This was definitely the case when the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan was launched, and it is the responsibility of members of the Board of Education to monitor progress in this area. In speaking with Board of Education members from around the state and nation, I know that we must also work within our schools to ‘grow our own’ future educators of color by creating opportunities that will encouraging our current students of color, including Latinx students, to explore the education field. One initiative that is underway in DPS is the TA to Teacher program, which supports teacher assistants in their aspirations to become certified teachers.

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?

I see restorative justice as an opportunity to build healthy relationships within classrooms and schools in order to focus on accountability and resolve conflicts. Most of the concerns I have heard from parents and the community on the implementation of DPS’ restorative justice program have been around capacity. I would have loved to have had more teachers trained in restorative justice concepts before officially launching the initiative. I understand that we wanted to move away from the In-school-suspension model as quickly as possible, but with our size as a district, I feel that we have moved slowly in training all of the professionals that we will rely on to make this a true success. As the training becomes more saturated in the district, and we adjust to lessons learned, I expect to see our discipline data continue to move in a positive direction.

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 do draw upon my experiences as a teacher when I consider the presence of SRO’s in our schools. The SRO’s that I worked along with were a part of the school culture, establishing meaningful relationships with the staff and students. My recollections are in line with the current MOU between the Sheriff’s Office and DPS. I do support the presence of SRO’s as long when they are in fact utilized as resources (as outlined in the MOU) and not as a function of the discipline plan, which I see as the function of the school administration.

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

In addition to the continued roll-out of the restorative justice plan as discussed above, I am encouraged that the entire DPS staff is now involved in racial equity training. In my roles as retired teacher, father of former DPS students, and now grandfather of DPS students, I know firsthand that the split-second between deciding when a teachable moment needs to become a discipline referral is often fueled by one’s expectations and even frustration. Establishing a quality relationship between the student and the adult before the situation arises is the best way to reduce the disproportionate number of students of color who are suspended, in my experience. That quality relationship should include communication with parents as much as possible. Making all of that happen district-wide is both a challenge, and a priority.

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?

Yes. Coming onto the Board of Education in 2016, I walked into a situation where disproportionate suspension rates, low academic achievement, and declining student enrollment were receiving the lion’s share of attention. As a member of the Operations Sub-committee, it often felt that funding for building maintenance and operations were more often than not deferred for future budgets. I no longer get that sense, as our Operations administrators’ are now meeting with County budget administrators with the intent to address years of deferments. In addition, the current Board of Education is considering proposals from the DPS Administration to correct the recurring shuffling of ‘deferred needs’ by increasing capital outlay funds from $1.37 million to $6 million annually.

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?

As a current board member, we updated our evaluation process over the last two years to prioritize leadership qualities in our superintendent as it relates to all stakeholders with whom they are responsible to. This includes parents, teachers, and principals, as well as the community-at-large. The work of the superintendent, in my opinion, is best achieved when everyone involved and impacted by board policy is fully informed of our goals, processes, and measurements. The current evaluation tool can still be improved upon, but it goes a long way toward that objective.

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.

As a Board of Education member in a majority-minority district, my first responsibility is to make sure that all parents and students who wish to share their experiences as stakeholders have a voice when important decisions are being made. Beyond the act of challenging our district’s commitment to equity at my board seat, I have personally fought for parent advocacy in the creation of the Durham Special Needs Advisory Council, the growth of the Parent Working Group of the Durham Campaign for Grade Level Reading, and meeting regularly with the leadership of the Durham Council of PTAs. All of these groups are bringing issues of equity to the table and are influencing DPS decisions.

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

I see school under-enrollment/overcrowding as dynamic issues in a growing county that must involve a multi-level conversation with district, city, and county officials informed by the community. We have to take a wide-angle look at student assignment, magnet programs, housing patterns, and economic data to assess how we got here, and where trends are leading us over the next 10-20 years. As easy as it is to look at under-enrolled schools today, we can’t ignore the growth happening in the streets around them. We will begin the conversation on potential student assignment adjustments this spring as a Board of Education and look forward to community input and insight.

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

This question requires a degree of perspective in the answer. When I compare Durham Public Schools’ local funding (37% of total funding) to neighboring districts, we are below Chapel-Hill/Carrboro (53%) and Orange (41%), but above Wake (31%) and Guilford (31%) [using National Center for Education Statistics data]. However, the student sizes, total number of schools, age of school buildings, and median household income are not directly comparable with those districts. Of these districts, only Wake is projected to grow faster than Durham in overall population over the next ten years. The growth factor is what would have me say that we have room to grow if we are to adequately plan for the students we that will be coming to our campuses over the next decade or two.

Personal Information:

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

North Carolina Central University, 1984

BA in Music Education, summa cum laude

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1986

MM in Music Education

[*Currently a 2nd year Ph.D. candidate at NC State University,*

*studying educational evaluation and policy analysis]*

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

Two adult children, who attended Holt & Merrick-Moore Elementary, Neal and Shepard Middle, and Southern and Hillside High schools.

1. Please describe your adult employment history

**1986-2019**

* Taught Middle School Band/Music/Chorus in Columbus County (3 years)
* Director of Bands/Music Educ. Faculty @ NC Central University (8 years)
* Director of Bands/International Baccalaureate Music @Hillside High (16 years)
* Taught Elementary Music/Chorus @ Bethesda Elementary (2 years)
* Director of Choral Music @ Hillside High (1 year)
* *[Retired from teaching in 2015]*
* Part-time Band instructor @ Cresset Christian Academy (3 years)
* *Member, Durham Public Schools Board of Education (2016-present)*