**PA-PAC Questionnaire for NC Superintendent of Public Instruction**

*When answering this questionnaire, please work from this document or repeat the questions in your response document with their numbers as they are organized here. Type your responses a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. Thank you for your participation!*

**Please return completed form along with your resume describing education, work history, community service and prior political experience AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, but by December 27, 2019 at the latest. Please respect the word limits for each question.**

**Email responses to** [page.mc@frontier.com](mailto:page.mc@frontier.com) and tom-miller1@nc.rr.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 North Carolina.**

Candidate Name:\_\_\_\_\_Keith Sutton\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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State Superintendent:

1. What experience do you bring to this office that make you the best candidate for the job? (250 word limit)

**My background and leadership experiences make me uniquely qualified to be North Carolina's next State Superintendent. I am a staunch fighter for public education and a relentless advocate for the appropriate funding for the state's public schools and the Department of Public Instruction. I have a professional background rooted in civil rights and advocacy, and I have spent a significant part of my professional career as an advocate for marginalized populations. I have served as the Executive Director of the North Carolina NAACP, and President/CEO of the Triangle Urban League. I took that experience to the Wake County Board of Education where I have spent the last 10 years continuing to advocate for policies that improve the lives of the students, employees and communities of Wake County. I have an Ivy League master's degree in Education Entrepreneurship from the University of Pennsylvania, so I have both the training and experience to provide transformational leadership. I currently serve as Chair of the Wake County Board of Education, a position I previously held in 2013. I have also served two years as Vice Chair in 2012 and 2019.**

2. List your top three priorities and, beside each, the first two steps you would take to get your priorities enacted. 200 word limit

**Priority 1 - Work with the General Assembly to provide the appropriate level of investment in public education to ensure success for all North Carolina students.**

* **Meet with the leadership of both the House and Senate to open the lines of communication and develop and a working relationship.**
* **Using the recently released Leandro report from WestEd, look for areas of agreement and cooperation that we can use as a starting point to build a working foundation.**

**Priority 2 - Overhaul the state’s strategy and approach for turning around and improving the state’s lowest performing schools.**

* **Recognize and acknowledge, as a state, that race and poverty have a profound impact on student achievement and success.**
* **Eliminate the Innovation School District (ISD) as a strategy for school improvement, recognizing that charter management companies are not the solution to this challenge.**

**Priority 3 - Evaluate the organizational structure and capacity of the Department of Public Instruction and engage in a restructuring that will be more responsive and improve service delivery and support.**

* **Assess the current organizational structure and determine the number of vacant positions.**
* **Initiate a strategic hiring process that is aligned with short- and long- term goals and operational efficiency.**

3. Will you fight for a moratorium on charters, for greater accountability and for avenues for charters to come under school board control? Why or why not? (200 word limit)

**Yes, I would fight for a moratorium on charters. Almost since their inception, charter schools in North Carolina have segregated schools and communities and siphoned off funds from traditional public schools. The future of charter schools should include a return to their original intent, which was to serve as incubators of education innovation. Successful innovations would then be scaled up in the traditional public schools. A moratorium on charters would allow for a process to conduct a more thorough review of their anticipated impact on the communities they plan to serve. A more inclusive review process might include an impact statement from the LEA where the school will serve and an option for the charter to operate under local control of the LEA if they so choose. This would eliminate LEAs from serving as a "pass through" for funding charter schools. It would also allow for greater accountability and increased support for the development of a more successful charter.**

4. Describe an experience as an elected official or a volunteer on a board where you took initiative to change a policy or service or initiate a new policy or service. Were you successful or not, and why. (200 word limit)

**In 2012-2013, while serving on the Wake County Board of Education, I recognized that the district needed to be more intentional about the ways in which it addressed equity. More importantly, I was concerned about the way in which the Wake County Public School System was able to hear and respond to both external and internal challenges with respect to race and diversity. Subsequently, I initiated an effort to create a position to ensure the system was being equitable to historically marginalized students and communities. In 2013, with the full support of the Wake County Board Education, the Office of Equity Affairs was created. Later in 2014, the Superintendent hired the first assistant superintendent for equity affairs. Currently, while a handful of districts in North Carolina have dedicated equity officers, Wake County stands out by supporting and staffing an entire office.**

5. Describe your experience as a supervisor: how many people were you supervising? How would you describe your “style” of supervision? (100 Word limit)

**My experience as a supervisor where I provided direct supervision has been primarily over small- to mid- sized teams of no more than 10-12 employees. As state superintendent, my leadership team would be organized in the same way where I would have no more than 5-7 direct reports. My style is one in which I surround myself with the required subject matter experts that can manage the day-to-day operation, while I provide strategic vision and leadership of the organization. This allows me to remove the institutional barriers to high performance and create the conditions for overall success.**

6. What is your plan for bolstering DPI services to low wealth, rural districts? (200 word limit)

**According to a recent** [**article**](https://www.educationdive.com/news/report-many-rural-districts-face-education-emergency/566696/) **in Education Dive, “North Carolina and Alabama are tied for second in terms of having the greatest needs among students in rural areas…”. Therefore, it is critical that we have a plan to address the needs and challenges experienced by rural communities. I have developed a Rural Education Agenda that will serve as a roadmap for bolstering DPI services to low wealth, rural districts that includes the following points:**

* **Provide an additional state appropriation to rural districts to address challenges such as teacher recruitment and retention.**
* **Identify opportunities to expand and deepen investments in technology.**
* **Enhance efforts to expand broadband access, including district- owned or leased cell towers and internet networks.**
* **Support a continued focus on early childhood education.**
* **Expand digital/distance learning to improve access to rigor.**
* **Provide more targeted and focused support to Advanced Placement teachers and students.**
* **Provide support for district collaboratives to share resources on items such as professional development, transportation, nutrition, athletics, CTE programs and other services.**

7. How can DPI assist districts that are attempting to reduce discriminatory outcomes in suspensions of children of color? (200 word limit)

**DPI can assist districts in reducing discriminatory outcomes in suspensions of children of color in the following ways:**

* **Work with the NC School Boards Association to recommend to boards and districts sample policies that seeks to reduce and/or eliminate suspensions for low-level infractions.**
* **Serve as a clearinghouse for effective practices and proven alternatives to suspension such as restorative practices, positive behavior interventions, and other social-emotional supports.**
* **Encourage and promote effective criminal justice partnerships and develop sample MOUs for interested districts.**
* **Recommend and/or provide training to district administrators, school resource officers (SROs) and other personnel involved with discipline on topics such as understanding the adolescent/teen brain and behaviors, de-escalation techniques, recognizing mental and physical disorders and appropriate responses to intervention.**
* **Recommend and/or provide training to school administrators and district officials on developing and maintaining a safe, supportive and effective school climate and culture.**

8. What is your plan for bolstering the recruitment and retention of teachers of color? (200 word limit)

**My plan for bolstering the recruitment and retention of teachers of color includes the following:**

* **Developing and maintaining meaningful partnerships with schools of education at historically minority serving institutions.**
* **Identify early opportunities to recruit promising students with an interest in a career in education and nurture/develop that interest through high school and into college.**
* **Identify and eliminate barriers of entry to the profession for teacher candidates of color such as bias in entrance exams, low starting salaries, and student debt.**
* **Identify and develop effective pipelines of teachers of color and characteristics of those pipelines such as effective onboarding and orientation, promising support strategies and networks and relevant professional development.**
* **Identify effective recruitment and retention tools such as performance incentives, bonuses and loan forgiveness programs that target male educators of color and educators of color that are willing to work in rural communities.**

9. What is your current involvement in and personal work regarding using a race equity lens in making decisions?  If you are or have been a school board member, please offer an example from board decision-making. If not, please offer an example from a personal or professional experience. (200 word limit)

**As a school board member, my current involvement in using a race equity lens in decision-making, is pushing Wake County and other districts to adopt a strong equity policy. Such a policy will serve to hold policymakers accountable for promoting meaningful equity that goes beyond adopting “value” statements that do not move the needle for students and communities.**

**As state superintendent, one priority would be to work with the State Board of Education to craft a statewide equity policy. This policy would serve to clearly define educational equity and guide the Department's work on addressing race equity in North Carolina's public schools. Such a policy would also serve as a guide for LEAs in crafting their own equity policy to address this work at the local level. Secondly, I would direct my team to develop an equity report card that will outline areas of focus such as addressing teacher diversity, providing students equitable access to effective teachers, equity resourcing of schools, and addressing statewide disparities. Lastly, the equity report card will provide an action plan to include aiding LEAs in recruiting and retaining teachers of color, reducing disproportionate suspensions of students of color, or closing the achievement gap.**

10. Lightning round: For each item, answer yes or no and include one sentence explaining your answer.

Do you support:

a. Opportunity Scholarships (vouchers)? Yes No

**No. Public money should not be used to subsidize tuition for private schools.**

b. The Innovative School District? Yes No

**No. I do not believe that enlisting the support of charter management companies or organization is the solution to improving our lowest performing schools.**

c. The two NC Virtual Charters? Yes No

**No. The virtual charters as they currently exist do not meet the educational needs or learning styles of the students who utilize them.**

**Personal Information**

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

**Please see resume.**

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

**Yes, my oldest daughter attended public schools in Johnston County and graduated from Smithfield-Selma High School. My youngest daughter has attended public schools here in Wake County and is currently a junior at Enloe High School.**

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

**Please see resume.**

1. Please list civic engagement activities, including service on boards, volunteer activities, elected positions, etc. (Skip if included on resume)

**Please see resume.**