

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: Alexandra Carolina Valladares

Address: 4918 Robinwood Rd., Durham, NC 27713

E-mail address: comunidaddedurham@gmail.com

Phone: 919-949-6020

Candidate for District: At-Large

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 is closing achievement gaps within Durham Public Schools by addressing inequities. We must develop and implement a long-term strategy that prioritizes student wellness and outcomes for all demographics while holding DPS accountable to all of the stakeholders in the community.

Dr. Mubenga has laid a foundation by developing a strategic plan to deal with pressing issues, especially closing achievement gaps. I served on the Superintendent's strategic planning committee to develop that plan as one of 5 Hispanic representatives. Additionally, I have been building parent networks within DPS for over 10 years, and most recently that has expressed itself through coordinating regular Latinx forum discussions with the Superintendent to hear concerns and build a coalition of historically underrepresented community members. Our focus has been addressing the unique needs presented by our families so that our children can succeed.

As a Board member, I intend to continue to be an advocate for people having access and a voice into our school system. I have fought for much as a parent and intend to fight for more as an official representative of the community. I believe that it's time.

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.

Durham County has provided funding and support for Universal Pre-K through the CCSA and agencies and that is commendable. My vision for Universal Pre-K is informed by my conversations with families and builds on the work currently underway:

- *Effective outreach to all parents with preschool aged children.*
- *Continual partnerships with Duke Regional, Family Connects, Book Harvest, Durham County Library, DSS, DHA, faith communities, grocery stores and other institutions that have ongoing interactions with potential Pre-K families.*
- *Bilingualism in all aspects of programming, hiring, and dissemination of information.*
- *Culturally sensitive approach and considerations for underserved, underprivileged communities. We need to make it clear that parents can apply without revealing citizenship status, otherwise, families with undocumented members are less likely to enroll, which will exacerbate the achievement gap.*
- *Effective planning for expansion over the next 5 years. Plans to host two Pre-K classrooms in each school needs further development, especially as we take a closer look at efforts at redistricting.*

- *Better coordination, collaboration and communication across the various Pre-K programs and service providers. The new website detailing the four Pre-K programs needs to be promoted further. Universal Pre-K has the potential to force better collaboration among previously isolated departments and organizations.*

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. The role of the board is to establish constancy of purpose as the primary engine of transformation for students, staff, teachers, administrators and families in Durham County, offering every resident the optimal chance to make the most of the opportunities that are available. We need to convey to families how much more is available in our public schools. Public schools require that 100% of teachers be certified, in comparison to 55% of certified teachers for charters. Also reporting of progress, EOGs, and grades in public schools means greater transparency. Charters are not required to share data, provide transportation, offer free/reduced lunch, ESL, etc.

While NC charter schools are public charter schools, funded by public tax dollars, and accountable to the NC Department of Public Instruction, policy guiding charter schools and their expansion has not created a level playing field for parents or school systems. DPS board resolution and lobbying efforts need to push not only for this moratorium and a piloted process for absorbing charters into their county district, but also expectations for charter schools to provide transportation, nutrition services, and mechanisms to ensure diversity in recruitment, admissions and enrollment of low income students, minorities, and exceptional children.

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 principles of community schools are commendable and defined as 6 foundational pillars that support improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities: high quality teaching, positive discipline, culturally relevant pedagogy, inclusive leadership, wrap-around services, and community engagement.

I am intimately familiar with the community schools concept as I performed extensive volunteer work for the community schools pilot at Club Boulevard

Elementary, which included getting parent buy-in, leading focus groups, developing bilingual surveys, organizing events, and tending to the school community as part of an asset and needs assessment at the school. A fully developed community schools model should help boost teacher retention, which is an issue that costs DPS roughly \$2.6-million more annually than if we had average attrition rates. We need to look into all available options for improving teacher retention.

Further, we know child development and achievement are impacted by more than just test taking abilities, so I support increasing the levels of holistic services our schools offer. DPS should develop a model for funding community schools in collaboration with Durham County that reflects the already established and shared values between DPS and the County.

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?

*I have been honored to lead efforts that improve access, family engagement, and communication between DPS leadership and Durham’s Hispanic population, which has grown to encompass 32.8% of the DPS student body. Through a series of Superintendent forums among other efforts, our families are identifying inequities and large education access gaps. Parents have been asking us to improve language access, hire and recruit more bilingual and bicultural interpreters, social workers, and support staff. It is unacceptable to not have **any bilingual counselors** nor Latinx principals in the district. We need to make it a strategic priority to change that. Additionally, our bilingual educators are not getting adequate compensation for the many roles they take on, which contributes to higher attrition. We must embrace the talent we have and provide avenues for educators to become Principals. In a district with 3,000+ employees, we currently only have 3 Latinx admins (2 APs & 1 Director). Let’s grow our talent as we continue to collaborate and coordinate with our universities, county departments, etc. to increase the number of bilingual educators. We need to support our Latinx students by leveraging resources to adequately support our families.*

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 justice as practiced in [indigenous and other non-Western cultures](#) prioritizes healing and reintegrating individuals into their community, as more important than punishment. As I have deepened relationships with the Coharie Tribe through a leadership and sustainability program, I have realized that our DPS pilot efforts into the indigenous “peacemaking process of bringing together victims, offenders and their supporters to get to the bottom of a problem” are only scratching the surface of a much more needed transformation.

DPS has taken initial steps in rolling out Restorative Practice Centers. In some cases the work is done deliberately and is delivering some promising results. Other schools approach restorative justice superficially: painting walls and printing a new sign, but not changing structures, policies, or hearts and minds of adults in power. Restorative justice builds community and is meant to be used proactively, to develop relationships of trust that foster a sense of personhood, belonging, safety, and joint responsibility for relationships and space. It can also be used reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. It is important for RPC coordinators to undergo sufficient training/process. Most coordinators are not trained to hold space for students experiencing duress.

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 know that the way law enforcement interacts with our students is a sensitive topic, especially as it relates to black and brown students. It is why past work led me to being invited to Sheriff Birkhead’s office where he signed a commitment to stop honoring unconstitutional ICE detainers that were breaking families apart.

We know that, nationally, the presence of SROs can lead to [higher rates of criminalization](#) of students. As in Vance County, we know that SROs sometimes use force. We know that federal immigration law enforcement agents have targeted our own students. As much as we want assurance that our kids are safe in school, I don’t know anyone who wants more childhood victims of the criminal justice system. I understand both perspectives on SROs, but I want our district to take the steps towards alternatives to SROs, like more full-time counselors. I believe the more lasting route to community safety does not involve punitive measures but instead fostering the social/emotional needs of students.

The latest MOU between the Sheriff and DPS is mostly a good move. We need to continue to build on reforms and continue to have a community based dialogue on the topic.

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

As a community organizer concerned with the school-to-prison pipeline in DPS, I am both encouraged and troubled. The work initiated and championed by Dr. Theresa McGowan at Lakeview School have created paths for students to get back on track and rejoin their school communities. Yet the deeper work involves transforming underlying practices at the school and classroom levels that disproportionately target and punish students of color at significantly different rates at several DPS schools. These disparities must be explored, explained, and addressed.

As a Board member, my plan is to ask the Superintendent to develop monthly tracking metrics on a school-by-school basis to identify disparities and address them before more students are impacted. Constant referrals breed recidivism and do not improve outcomes. The Office of Equity Affairs could intervene and work with the school administration and Student Support Services to develop a transformation plan. The Superintendent and our principals must become aware that many of our students are not adequately receiving mental health supports for community violence, trauma, and/or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

We need accountability mechanisms in place for schools that do not demonstrate improvement around this topic. Not addressing it would be tantamount to leaving our students to fend for themselves within a state-run criminal justice apparatus.

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?

DPS has a significant backlog of deferred maintenance needs due in part from underfunding of school-directed capital bonds. The Durham community in the 2010s funded over \$200-million for a new courthouse and new police station (combined, not even 450,000 square feet) but only passed \$90-million in bonds to take care of over 6-million square feet of DPS facilities and rebuild one high school. If we want to end the school-to-prison pipeline, we need to make funding schools our priority.

We need to make sure that when we do invest, we do it equitably. If we ask the County to fund a recurring deferred maintenance fund for capital investments from the local General Fund--as the School Board asked just last year--that

policy puts a disproportionate burden on the existing tax base. Deferred maintenance (roofs, chillers, boilers, flooring, paint, etc.) should be funded from capital loans so that existing residents don't foot the entire bill for long-term assets while future residents aren't able to contribute. We know wealthier residents are displacing existing, oftentimes poorer residents at an alarming rate in Durham, so it is not equitable to demand higher payments as folks are pushed out.

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?

My understanding is that the Board recently reviewed the Superintendent on the performance metrics that had been presented to him. It is true there have been great strides in achievement in parts of DPS, but we need to make sure every subgroup is making great strides. Hispanic students had been performing at 110th in the state (out of 116) and made very little progress last year. Are we going to judge the Superintendent on how well he can bring white students into the district or are we going to judge the Superintendent on how well he can lift the achievement of the students we already have in the district? I will evaluate him on the latter.

As for obtaining internal honest feedback for evaluation, I fully support a more robust implementation of 360-degree reviews so workers have a chance to provide review of their supervisors, and we need to make sure more classified workers participate in their new Working Conditions Survey. I also will strive to make sure external feedback from parents is heard equitably, especially from typically underrepresented working class families and black and brown parents.

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 current commissioner on Durham's [Human Relations Commission](#) (HRC), racial equity is at the core of what we do. Vocationally, I work for BOOST, a science outreach program at Duke University, and we use a race equity lens in making decisions about students as we work to remove barriers to participation. The program used to recruit students from schools traditionally in the Duke-Durham partnership (Watts, EK Powe, etc) and pair them with a Duke

student mentor, but at my guidance we directed our attention to Eastway and CC Spaulding, and expanded our recruitment of mentors to include my alma mater, North Carolina Central University.

Representation matters and there aren't many people of color who are visibly represented in STEM fields. A really big part of BOOST is to provide opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented students: kids of color, kids who come from low income households.

I also do work with the University of Vermont for their Leadership and Sustainability Masters Program. I lead circles with students and was the facilitator for the employee retreat for the Climate Justice Alliance. My work hosting circles often leads to discussions about power and privilege, systems of oppression, and dismantling racism.

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

Some of our schools are overcrowded while others (and even entire areas) are under-enrolled. I think some of that is the result of a capital improvement plan from the last 15 years that did not match the growth patterns of the community. There was a significant capital investment in the northern area of Durham (Sandy Ridge, CMA, Lucas, Eno Valley renovation, pending Northern rebuild) even though other parts of Durham have seen more growth. In the future, I would like to see DPS work more collaboratively with the Durham Planning Department to plan with growth.

We now are facing a very delicate community conversation about redistricting. I support the administration's commitment to embark on a robust and comprehensive community engagement process that reflects on equity throughout the conversation. As a Board member, I will be sure to listen and make sure voices from the entire community, especially historically underrepresented constituents, are respected. I will also commit to directly and independently engaging with the community throughout the redistricting process to collect feedback and assure this endeavor is grounded in equitable decision making.

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

Local operational funding has had to increase lately just to try to maintain service levels because of divestment from the state level. We've seen state policy reduce

income taxes for the wealthiest North Carolinians and outright eliminate income taxes for corporations. (Both groups have also received substantial federal tax cuts.) I am hopeful that we can have a Board of County Commissioners that is interested in pursuing more equitable and more progressive taxation strategies to work with those who are benefiting the most from the System and who have the most extra income to contribute to the betterment of our community. Otherwise, if we continue to increase a regressive local property tax to cover the needs presented by a loss in state funding, we are effectively deepening a wealth shift to upper income and corporate interests. I am a fervent supporter of using a more progressive local tax structure to reclaim some of the DPS losses that have incurred over the years and expand our local funding to include a local supplement for classified workers, additional teaching assistants and more counselors in our schools.

Personal Information:

1. Please describe your educational background, noting any degrees and honors you have earned. (Skip if resume included)
2. Do you have children? If so, where do they, or did they, attend school?
I have two DPS students. One attends DSA and the other attends Lowes Grove.
3. Please describe your adult employment history (skip if resume included)