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Survey Finds Council Candidates Willing to Consider Public Education Change

Washington D.C. - April 25, 2022— [Coalition for DC Public School and Communities \(C4DC\)](#) surveyed D.C. Council Candidates on public education management, governance, and student assignment policy. Of the 28 candidates competing for the Democratic nomination in 6 different contests -- Council Chair, At-Large Council, and Wards 1, 3, 5, and 6 -- fifteen of them responded to the questions posed by C4DC civic organizations. “I was pleased to see that most of the candidates showed that they understand that strengthening by-right pathways at DCPS is the key to educational equity,” said Cathy Reilly, leader of the Senior High Alliance for Parents Principals and Educators, and facilitator of the Ward 4 Alliance, referencing a [recent statement on public education by C4DC](#).

Currently, DC has 69 separate school systems or Local Education Agencies (LEA) and one of those is DCPS, the school system of right for all students. DC has 249 publicly funded DCPS and charter schools for 94,522 students. According to Edscape, there is facilities capacity within both sectors for 125,997 students. The Public Charter School Board has the power to approve unlimited enrollment expansions at existing schools as well as to authorize up to 10 new charter LEAs a year. DCPS also has the power to open new schools and expand existing schools. “We have a system that has no limit on the supply of schools regardless of the number of students. Finally, it seems that the Council is waking up to the problems of this system and I was encouraged to see that 10 of the 14 candidates would support or consider giving the Council control over the level of charter school enrollment and the number of charter schools,” said Suzanne Wells, long-time Ward 6 education advocate.

“With the unprecedented resources appropriated by the Council for public education, we know that more could have been achieved for our children and our communities over the last two decades if the primary reforms had not been school choice and mayoral control. If DC had genuinely prioritized equity and engaged in a true partnership with its students, families, neighborhoods, and school staff, DCPS could have created high-quality, satisfying, enjoyable educational experiences in every ward. Instead, too many families across the city routinely must endure the hustle and anxiety of the school lottery against a backdrop of schools continuously opening and closing,” said Nzinga Tull of Ward 7 resident and Teaching for Change Board Chair.

“After almost 16 years of Mayoral control of public education, this survey shows that many candidates know that the Council needs to consider making some changes in public education governance. We need more robust avenues for communities to engage in how we govern this public institution democratically.” - Robert Henderson, Ward 5 Education Equity Committee

All responding candidates agreed that there should be an Education Committee on the DC Council. Currently, Education is part of the Committee of the Whole under the Chairman of the Council. In addition, 10 candidates support authority for the State Board of Education to initiate policy in the areas they currently have jurisdiction over, not just approve it.

“As a former high school English and Government teacher, I am always deeply concerned that systems that affect and impact the public good are not steeped in democracy. Education is a public good. Somehow, someday, we have lost this fundamental understanding. Therefore, in order to recenter education as a public good, it is important to reexamine our current school governance structures. This is not about a particular governmental official. It is about a deep commitment to the whole child, the whole family and the whole community. We cannot fulfill this commitment when there is no codified process for the people's voices to be heard,” said Dr. Marla M. Dean, Chair of the Ward 7 Education Council.

The C4DC survey also covers issues particular to DCPS. For example: all but one respondent agreed that DCPS should have budget protections because of its responsibilities as the by-right school system. Concerns with operations and maintenance of facilities, student safety and teacher turnover are all addressed by each of the respondents in detail.

“Four years ago, we were still debating whether we really had a teacher retention challenge in DC. Now we have a broad consensus that this is one of the most critical issues we must confront- and it’s heartening to see candidates coming to the table with serious ideas to improve teacher wellbeing, professional development, and the sustainability of the career. Hopefully they will be listening to teachers about what ideas will have the most impact,” said Scott Goldstein, Executive Director of Empower Ed

“I appreciated the wide number of issues covered by this survey and the level of detail the candidates offered. I especially liked the questions on education governance and knowing the positions of the candidates on the options offered. The Council appropriates over \$2 billion a year to elementary and secondary schools. I encourage all voters to look at what these [candidates are saying](#) about our public education system in D.C.” - Karin Perkins, Co-Chair, Ward 3 Education

[See the Council Candidates survey answers here.](#)

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Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities ([C4DC](#)) is a coalition of all eight ward education councils as well as other organizations that share values and priorities essential to excellent and equitable District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).

C4DC is committed to these principles:

- Ensure all families have access to high-quality DCPS schools in their neighborhoods – a predictable, matter-of-right path from preschool through high school.
- Focus resources on students and communities with the greatest need.
- Require coordinated planning between the [District of Columbia Public Schools](#) (DCPS) and the [Public Charter School Board](#) (PCSB) to build a core system of stable DCPS neighborhood schools with a complementary set of alternative options.
- Responsibly manage our financial resources.
- Broaden assessment measures to focus on student growth and use multiple measures to assess a quality education.
- Ensure families and community members have reliable ways to exercise the right to participate in public education decision-making.