

**Edu Decision 14 - Mayoral Forum on Education  
Candidate Questionnaire  
Response from Muriel Bowser, Democratic Nominee for Mayor**

- 1. How committed are you to ensuring we have a citywide network of excellent DCPS neighborhood schools serving children from pre-K through high school to which families have a right to attend (without being subject to a lottery)?**
  - a. Absolutely?**
  - b. It would be nice?**
  - c. It is not necessary given the other choices available?**

**If “Absolutely”, what steps would you take to make it a reality? If b or c, what is your response to families around the city who crave both quality and predictability?**

Absolutely. As Mayor, I will work with my education team to ensure that we have put in place the needed resources to ensure high-quality pre-K is available to all our families in their neighborhoods. Many studies have shown how critical access to high-quality pre-K is to a student’s success and that of their parents to build the middle class and ensure our city’s strong future. Much needs to be done to make this a reality. I will work to expand quality early childhood education programs to reach more students at a younger age across the District to ensure that all children are prepared to succeed in K-12 education and beyond. That means accelerating the pace of school reform by discontinuing ineffective programs and policies and replicating those that have demonstrated strong outcomes. It also means partnering with our higher education institutions, like UDC and the community college, to ensure we are training the next generation of pre-K teachers to be innovative and effective.

- 2. Should there be a mechanism for coordinated planning between DCPS and the Public Charter School Board relating to the opening, closing or expansion of schools?**

**If you believe there should be such a mechanism, what are your ideas for how it might operate? If you do not, what is your vision for what the education infrastructure should look like 10 or 20 years down the road? How should we ensure our money spent on public education (1 in 5 of our tax dollars) is spent efficiently and effectively?**

DCPS and public charter schools make up our public education system. I believe a focused mayor can achieve voluntary coordination among our public school sector to achieve better planning in regards to school location decisions. As Mayor, I will incentivize coordination through the use of empty school buildings and revenue bonds in order to close gaps in quality seats.

- 3. Many believe an increasing number of DCPS elementary schools are gaining traction and the next major challenge is to strengthen our DCPS offerings in the middle grades. Some call for**

**replicating the success of our largest middle school – Alice Deal. The Student Assignment Committee called for opening four new middle schools – two in Ward 4, one in Ward 2 and one in Ward 7.**

**What are practical ways to strengthen existing middle schools? Do you support the proposed new middle schools? If so, what would you do to ensure these middle schools are successful? If not, which of the new middle schools do you not support and why?**

Just this year we've seen an increase in enrollment in both traditional and charter public schools – a good sign. Increasing student enrollment in DCPS is a function of convincing parents that our public schools offer a safe, high-quality education equal to that provided at any private, parochial, or charter school. As Mayor, I will support the proposed new middle schools, but will take a fresh look to see if this list is complete. I will focus my efforts to completely transform the District's middle schools by 2020, a process that will include the identification of those schools that need change the fastest, the renovation or construction of new buildings, and the evaluation and innovation of the curricular and extra-curricular offerings at each of the District's 13 stand-alone middle schools. Some schools will require more attention than others. That is why I will create a strategy to provide additional resources to chronically underperforming schools in all eight wards, with a specific focus on the 25 lowest performing schools in the District. With additional concentrated resources, evidence-based interventions, and the creative efforts of the Mayor's office and education leaders, these schools can and will be turned around to better prepare students for long-term educational success.

**4. There are two, perhaps competing, goals in DC – one is to preserve and strengthen a system of neighborhood schools of right, the other is to create socio-economically integrated schools. Do you agree that these are two of our most important goals? What strategies would you advocate to accomplish both of these goals?**

Our goal is to have high quality schools in every neighborhood at every level. Boundary and feeder lines cannot accomplish this.

Parents and students across the District expect and deserve a Mayor who will lead both collaboratively and decisively, with an evidence-based approach to moving our schools forward as quickly as possible. As Mayor, I will accelerate the pace of school reform by discontinuing ineffective programs and policies and replicating those that have demonstrated strong outcomes to ensure that all students receive a high quality public education. Specifically, my education plan includes:

- Accelerating the pace of school reform with a renewed focus on accountability and results
- Ensuring strong, innovative, and mission-driven leadership at DCPS
- Transforming the District's middle schools by 2020
- Increasing collaboration between DCPS and charter schools
- Supporting targeted efforts to take schools from good to great
- Expanding early childhood education programs
- Increasing STEM Education Options Across the District

- Expanding Parent and Family Engagement Efforts.
- Ensuring that new feeder and boundary plans do not isolate historic neighborhoods
- Strengthening support for families seeking out of boundary options
- Strengthening recruitment and support for students in specialty and application high schools
- Continuing and expanding Kids Ride Free to ensure access to these application schools via public transit

Read more about my education priorities here: <http://murielformayor.com/press/priorities-for-district/>

**5. Are you satisfied with the transparency of the DCPS and charter school budgets? Are you satisfied with the mechanisms for community input and the time allowed for planning to construct those budgets? If not, what methods would you suggest be put in place so that transparency and planning are improved in both sectors?**

I am not satisfied. We can do more to improve the transparency of the DCPS and charter school budgets. The Mayor should seek public input in the Fall before finalizing the budget and sending it to the Council has received the budget. There must also be increased financial accountability of charter spending, to avoid any contracting and financial irregularities.

**6. Have we gotten the amount of standardized testing we do right? Are the stakes attached to standardized tests -- for teachers, principals and schools -- right? Do you see an interplay between the tests we focus on and the texture and richness of the curriculum in our schools? If so, is that a positive interplay? If not, how would you address the issue?**

Standardized testing is best used to measure how each child is performing when compared to peers in the same grade. These tests have come a long way, and I still don't think we have a perfect model. Every student is an individual, who will fill a unique role in our communities upon leaving the DC public schools system. Each student acquires skill sets for that role in an individualized way – everyone learns differently. This is also why standardized tests are only one measure of student success. The texture and richness of the curriculum in our schools is equally important – student satisfaction, early reading skills, and ongoing diagnostics of math skills also help parents and teachers monitor student progress. That said, creating a baseline for comparison by using standardized testing models is a necessary tool to make sure we are pushing our students towards success.

As Mayor, I want to make sure we are able to continue to demonstrate how our investment in our students' success is comparing year on year within DC and with other school districts. We have invested in making our schools great, and we must keep on the path towards that goal. As the decision to use the PARCC test has been made, I support staying the course so as not to disrupt implementation and learn whether the test meets our needs. Moving forward, I am always open to ensuring that the interplay between preparing for the current standardized tests and our curriculum goals are meeting the needs of our students.

**7. Which is a better indicator of the quality of a school? The percentage of children achieving proficiency or the average amount of growth achieved by children at the school? If you believe the latter is a better indicator, are we focusing adequately on it? What steps should we take to place the appropriate emphasis on it?**

There are many metrics that will help us measure the quality of a school and, similar to educator effectiveness, we should not limit our determination to one measure. We want to ensure our students are achieving proficiency and reaching beyond. Both data points are important indicators to measure student success. Student growth is important because it will help us see how well a school can move students over the course of a year compared to their peers. Overall proficiency is important because it measures how well students are performing against our determined standards for a given grade level. These two measures together are the floor of what data we should be examining to determine student success.

Because a school should be measured by how well it prepares all students for their success in the future, we should also be looking at each school's individual goals, especially for those schools that offer a specialized program. As a jurisdiction with close to half of our students in public charter schools and a public school district that offers many unique academic, vocational, and technical programs, it is important that we hold these school accountable for meeting their unique programmatic goals as well.

We need to evaluate our educational outcome goals as a system of public schools. As Mayor, I would ensure that our education leaders are developing real, transparent, well-communicated metrics that will enable families to make the best decisions possible of their children. These same metrics will enable our leaders to make the best decisions about how to improve a school's performance.

**8. Are you satisfied with our recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators? Does your view differ for DCPS and the charter sector? Data suggests we have very high turnover in both sectors, particularly in schools serving high poverty populations. According to published reports, 25% of principals leave each year and 50% of new teachers leave after two years, 80% after six years. Is that a good thing as evidence of an aggressive accountability rubric or a sign that something is wrong? If you believe something is wrong, what kinds of steps would you take to address this issue?**

High turnover of teachers and principals is not a good thing. We must continue to improve efforts to attract and retain high-performing teachers and principals. In addition to rigorous recruiting practices, we must provide incentives and supports to our promising and high-performing teachers. Also, by providing extra funding to schools serving high poverty populations, and spreading reform across the District, teachers and principals will feel more valued, and therefore be more committed to the goal of student achievement across the city.

9. **One of the frequently heard expressions is that we must “speed up” or “pursue with more urgency” education reform – generally thought of as what has been happening since the onset of mayoral control and the tenure of Michelle Rhee. Have we made significant progress in closing the achievement gap in this seven year period? If not, what does that say about our efforts to date? Does it suggest the need for a course correction? If so, which specific elements of what people refer to as “education reform” would you place greater emphasis on? Which specific elements would you move away from?**

DC’s achievement gap is ultimately an income gap – it reflects the resource challenges faced by too many of our students and its persistence conspires against the potential of our neediest students. Students who bring more family resources to school are poised to do better, but all of our students have the potential to excel. I believe we need to do more – both inside and outside our school walls – to support our students and families and the teachers that serve them. While we have made some progress, that progress hasn’t been felt in every neighborhood.

Every child in the District of Columbia deserves the opportunity to attend a clean, safe, modern, high-quality public school in their own neighborhood. As mayor, my duty to all of our students, regardless of where they live, is to ensure they are college-and career-ready when they graduate from high school. As Mayor, a top priority will be to provide a world-class public education that prepares all students in all eight wards for success. As Mayor, I will set specific goals for my administration to achieve this, including transforming middle schools by 2020, launching my Good to Great Initiative, improving accountability and results, broadening STEM education, and expanding early childhood education opportunities. Read more about my education priorities here:

<http://murielformayor.com/press/priorities-for-district/>