

## Candidate Questionnaire

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?

*I am absolutely committed to furthering school improvement efforts and ensuring that all students can access matter-of-right high quality neighborhood schools. During my tenure as Chair of the Committee on Education, I have already made significant progress, including:*

- *Establishing a new weight within the school funding formula to support students at risk of academic failure, which delivered almost \$80 million in new funding to over 36,000 students in the current school year;*
- *Ending the practice of social promotion;*
- *Fully funding the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and establishing a new Office of the Student Advocate;*
- *Investing millions to increase the number of school librarians, provide teachers with classroom technologies, and insulate schools from major year-to-year budget fluctuations; and*
- *Initiating the most comprehensive overhaul of the District’s special education system in our city’s history.*

*As Mayor, I will build on this progress so that we can achieve a citywide network of excellent DCPS neighborhood schools. I will promote stability within school leadership and provide them with the autonomy they need to best serve their students and communities. I will close the growing achievement gap by fully funding the at-risk weight so schools can meet the academic needs of their students and improve special education services for our students and their families. I will also ensure horizontal equity in academic and enrichment programming so that a student in Southeast gets the same educational opportunities as a student in Northwest. And I will promote greater coordination and vertical alignment within feeder patterns so students and families can have confidence in school programs from pre-kindergarten through graduation.*

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?

*I have repeatedly stated that there needs to be improved cross-sector planning between DCPS and the Public Charter School Board with respect to the opening, closing, or expansion of schools. That is why I introduced and secured enactment of the Comprehensive Planning and Utilization of School Facilities Act, which made critical improvements to the District law governing the city’s educational planning efforts. Specifically, the*

*measure requires a new annual supplement to the Master Facility Plan that collects and makes public data on current and projected enrollment needs for DCPS and individual charter schools. It will also require a review of projected school facility needs, overcrowding, underutilization, and the classification of each DCPS building based on use. These new requirements will provide District officials and the public with greater understanding on how we use all of our DCPS and PCS school buildings and will improve long term school facility planning.*

*As Mayor, I will build on these efforts by ensuring greater communication and coordination between the two sectors on issues related to the opening, closing or expansion of schools. This includes better data sharing, increased transparency, stronger accountability and greater opportunity for public input.*

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?

*School improvement isn't a one size fits all proposal. Creating high quality schools – especially at the middle grades – takes hard work, talented leaders, and an engaged community. As Mayor, I will provide all our middle schools with the specific tools they need to succeed. This includes fully funding the at-risk weight, providing resources for improved technology and classroom supports, and ensuring that our school leaders have greater autonomy over school programming. While these efforts will go a long way, strengthening our middle schools depends upon having high quality elementary schools. Students attending Alice Deal Middle School often come from some of the District's highest achieving elementary schools. To ensure the success of all middle schools, our elementary students must be provided with targeted academic and support services that prepare them for middle school curriculum. We must also have equity in programming between feeder elementary schools so that students entering a particular middle school have shared academic experiences.*

*In addition to improving existing middle schools, I believe we must provide families with additional options at the middle grades. Beginning in early 2013, I started working with the Hillcrest Education Committee to launch a new application middle school east of the Anacostia River. This collaborative effort led to DCPS approval of the project, which was included as part of the Student Assignment Committee's recommendations for new middle schools. To ensure this critical project moves forward, I was proud to include \$8 million in FY15 capital funding to initiate the formal planning and construction process. As Mayor, I will continue efforts to bring a new middle school to Ward 7 and will work with community stakeholders and education leaders to determine actual need and costs associated with any additional middle schools.*

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?

*Strengthening our system of neighborhood schools of right and creating socio-economically integrated schools are two important goals we should be focusing on within our education system. Key to accomplishing each is*

*improving school quality. Having quality schools in neighborhoods throughout the city will provide families with greater academic opportunities and increase confidence in matter-of-right schools. I will improve school quality by fully funding the at-risk weight so students get the supports they need, promoting stability within school leadership and providing greater school-level autonomy, and ensuring greater horizontal equity in programming and vertical alignment within feeder patterns.*

*Improved school quality will also help promote diversity among student populations because families could choose from a number of high quality schools, rather than all competing for limited slots in a select few high achieving programs. At the same time, we must also ensure that the District doesn't take steps to undo or undermine diversity as it exists today. That is why I have been critical of recommendations that would have the impact of carving out significant populations of African American and Hispanic students from the Deal Middle School and Wilson High School feeder pattern and moving them to lower performing schools.*

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?

*Historically, the DCPS budget had been the most difficult to navigate of all District agencies. It was extremely opaque and didn't line up to the programs and services that parents and educators saw on a day-to-day basis. In addition, the DCPS budget as actually submitted by the Mayor did not align with how DCPS actually managed its operations. This lack of transparency prevented informed community participation in the budget process and severely limited the Council's ability to conduct effective oversight.*

*When I became Chair of the Committee on Education, I immediately addressed this issue. I put in law a requirement that the OCFO work with DCPS to develop recommendations for a more transparent budget format. I then spent a year working with DCPS and OCFO leadership to implement these recommendations and develop one standard budget format. As a result, the FY2015 DCPS budget is – for the first time in years – the same for both the public and for DCPS. Parents can now see individual school budgets, and agency costs are broken down into easily understood categories. This transparency allowed for greater understanding of and participation in the DCPS budget development process.*

*As Mayor, I will continue to work with the OCFO to further refine the format so that we can adequately track classroom investments, including the at-risk funding. Not only will this ensure that the funding is being used where its most needed – in the classroom – but it will also allow DCPS and the public to measure whether or not the investments are helping achieve the goal of reducing achievement gaps. I will also continue to work with the Public Charter School Board to increase transparency in charter school budgets, both with respect to operating and facility funding. In addition, I will work to provide school leaders and LSATs ample time and support to review proposed budgets and allow for greater public participation in the development of budget priorities.*

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?

*During my 144 school visits and various talks with community stakeholders, I consistently heard concerns about the number of tests administered and amount of instructional time dedicated to test preparation and test administration. That is why I authored and secured enactment of legislation – the Focused Student Achievement Act – that ensures schools are using testing protocols designed to help students demonstrate more completely their skills without over testing and impacting instructional time. I have also raised issues about the subjective nature of how standardized tests are scored, especially given the high stakes associated with test results.*

*I understand that the need to adequately measure student achievement and growth is important. However, I do not believe that testing should be the only way we measure the success of our students and our system as a whole. As Mayor, I will focus on improving the quality of classroom instruction and providing our teachers with the resources and supports they need to succeed. I will also work with our education leaders and community stakeholders to ensure that our testing supports the curriculum, rather than the other way around.*

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?

*Both proficiency and growth are important indicators when looking at the quality of a school. At this time, however, most quality indicators are based merely on student proficiency, which often doesn't allow for consideration of issues such as the impact of poverty. As Mayor, I will seek to find a more appropriate balance between the two so that we can have a more complete picture as to how our students – and our schools – are doing. This will require working with our school leaders to understand how we can best capture growth indicators, whether through adaptive testing or other means, and use that information to better serve our students academic needs.*

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?

*Key to improving school quality is maintaining a strong education workforce. Yet, in the District we are faced with dramatic turnover year after year. In fact, approximately a quarter of our principals leave each year and half of our new teachers don't stay past two years. This lack of stability is often a significant obstacle to quality improvement efforts and has to stop.*

*As Mayor, I will focus on establishing school cultures and working conditions that attract and retain the best administrators and teachers. This includes ensuring that teachers and principals have access to resources and assistance designed to support effective teaching models. It also means providing greater autonomy for our principals as they manage their schools and ensuring consistency and open communication for teachers and allowing for meaningful participation in the development of policies and procedures.*

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?

*Mayoral control has allowed DCPS to move beyond many of the issues that previously plagued its operation. We have modernized our schools, classrooms have supplies, and enrollment is increasing. But we have not seen the same progress with respect to closing the growing achievement gap. Our schools continue to lead the nation in performance disparities based on the race, ethnicity, and income status of our students. We have the largest African American and white student performance disparity in the country on the National Assessment for Education Progress, and the DC CAS reading proficiency gap has grown since 2008 as the percentage of African American and Latino students performing at or above proficient on the DC CAS has stagnated. These disparities extend beyond testing and are also evident in chronic absenteeism, student promotion, and low on-time graduation rates.*

*I believe that my work to establish a new funding weight for students who are economically disadvantaged, behind in school, or face other challenges such as homelessness, is an important first step in providing teachers with the resources they need to help close the achievement gap. As Mayor, I will continue this work by increasing the dollars associated with this new at-risk weight and ensuring that these funds flow directly to students rather than central office functions. I will also provide teachers and school leaders with increased professional development opportunities and with critical technology and classroom supports so that they can best serve their students. In addition, I will fully implement student health and behavioral health programs, such as those initiated as part of my South Capitol Street Memorial Act, to ensure that students have access to critical wrap around services. Only then will we be able to reverse the growing achievement gap and make sure that all our student are on the path to success.*