

Council Chair

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On a scale of 1 to 100: Do you agree with this statement? The primary public agency responsible for the socio-emotional problems of children and youth caused and exacerbated by the pandemic should be the DCPS public schools.	65
Teacher turnover in DC's public schools are among the highest in the nation, and the pandemic has made teaching even more challenging. What do you think can be done to address teacher turnover in DCPS?	
<p>I'd like to begin by sharing my DC Council Accountability Plan (https://erinfordc.medium.com/dc-council-accountability-plan-bda504ae31f1) – the first ever comprehensive, evidence-based plan to build a more effective, modern, and ethical Council of the District of Columbia – and my Plan for Public Education as a Right (https://erinfordc.medium.com/plan-for-public-education-as-a-right-60b99fdc3715) – which provides detailed proposals to fully fund our public schools, conduct real education oversight, and support safe and healthy school buildings. Importantly, these plans are informed by my experience as a parent in DC, with three children in a public charter school. On a very personal level, I can tell you that my children's educators' working conditions are critical to their learning conditions. They rise and fall together. Supporting and retaining good teachers is good for our teachers, our schools, and our children. Taken together, these Plans provide important information regarding my values and proposals for how the DC Council can strengthen our public schools. With regard to teacher retention, we know what works to recruit and retain teachers – starting with better pay and benefits. The idea that any teacher at a publicly-funded school would struggle to afford to live in DC is a travesty and contributes to high teacher turnover. One critical way to help close this gap is to make it easier for teachers at charter schools to form and join unions. People of color benefit from unions: evidence shows that the union wage premium is significantly higher for workers of color than white workers. I've marched with substitute teachers in DC who deserve to be making significantly more than minimum wage for their commitment to our kids. The importance of substitutes has been emphasized in the Covid-19 pandemic, but they've always been critical to the functioning of our schools. The Mayor has yet to deliver on her promise for a full-time substitute teacher in every school, and regrettably the current Chair has not been pushing aggressively to have these critical positions filled.</p>	
<p>I also support "Grow Your Own" programs that encourage and support members of our community to study education and enter the profession – especially paraprofessionals who are already working in our schools. These programs should include scholarships to help overcome any financial hardships to entering the profession, include supports for achieving required teacher certifications, and have a strong mentorship component. Nevada has invested \$9 million in a pathway program for paraprofessionals to be trained to become teachers, adding 425 pre-service educators to their local teaching workforce. There are best practices and programs we can assess for DC, and my DC Council Accountability Plan calls for more resources to allow the Council to do just that. While pay and workplace culture are essential, I also know that representation matters in hiring, training, and retaining new staff. I saw firsthand in my career as a lawyer in a law firm and with the federal Judiciary that having a woman on the hiring committee makes a difference in women being hired and staying in the job. Having mentors with similar backgrounds provides a necessary support structure and sounding board that improves retention. Finally, data is extremely important in addressing many of our education issues, and DC is playing catchup in many regards. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education recently started sharing more information on teachers across the District's public schools. You can now access teacher retention, experience, and demographic information by school on the Office's website. While this new access gives us a great tool for monitoring and oversight, unfortunately, we do not yet have many years of this data available like in other districts. We can learn from successful ways other jurisdictions have used these tools, however, to encourage recruitment and retention of diverse, representative, and high-quality educators. For example, researchers at George Mason used similar data from Fairfax, in combination with teacher application data, to find that even after accounting for advanced degrees and experience, white teachers were more likely to be hired than Black teachers. These findings are both painful and unsurprising and yet unexplored and undocumented in the District. As Council Chairwoman, I will ensure that we continue to use both oversight and legislation to monitor the recruitment and retention of educators across our public schools and adjust our practices as needed in response. This could be through oversight or, for example, through legislation that requires detailed plans, to be approved by the DC Council, from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education for making progress on this important work. Importantly, I commit to always including educator voice in these efforts and being responsive to their needs. We will not increase retention without teacher voice as a foundation for this work.</p>	

The pandemic has highlighted the need to provide equitable student access to technology as part of a 21st-century education. What will you do to ensure DCPS supports comprehensive technology planning and funding to support student learning?

I strongly support comprehensive technology planning for DC Public Schools. Part of what was so concerning about watching DC schools respond to Covid-19 was the lack of preparedness for virtual learning, both in terms of access to technology and training to use that technology. We should never be caught unprepared like this. For years, parents have advocated for a comprehensive multi-year technology plan to ensure that all DC Public Schools students and schools have access to devices, technology support, digital literacy skills, and Internet. Much like other education challenges facing DC, comprehensive planning is so important to prevent a piecemeal approach that worsens inequities. In fact, thanks to this advocacy, several Councilmembers introduced the DCPS Technology Equity Act of 2021. I support this bill and as Chairwoman I would ensure that it proceeds through the legislative process expeditiously and that the Council is prepared to oversee and monitor the legislation’s goals. While DC Public Schools has stated that they provide 1:1 technology for certain students and grades, that appears to have not been the case. We also know there are challenges collecting and redistributing, replacing, and repairing devices; providing technology support so teachers and students can fully take advantage of existing technology; outdated classroom technology; and access to high-quality Internet. (I have advocated for years for municipal Internet, in part to assure we are meeting need and addressing inequities across DC.) We also continue to drive students toward low-quality commercial discount internet “access” programs that are not adequate for the work our students should be doing. These challenges are reflective, in part, of continued failed Council action and oversight. Comprehensive technology planning is essential, and I commit to moving forward and funding such planning. My DC Council Accountability Plan would equip the Council to better make laws, conduct oversight, and collect and use data – all of which would be helpful in making sure our schools are able to use technology to help and support our students.

DCPS school communities have concerns with the quality of building repair and maintenance including HVAC systems in older as well as newly modernized buildings. How can the Council address their concerns with DCPS facilities operations and maintenance?

We have seen repeated failures in DC Council oversight, specifically as related to Covid-19 and schools. Our children have paid the price of the current Council Chair’s unilateral decision to dissolve the Education Committee, concentration of power in the Chair position, and lack of focus on DC schools. Despite 18 months knowing students would ultimately be back in school buildings, we watched as students returned this fall to faulty HVAC systems, missing HEPA filters, lack of outdoor equipment for meals, and lack of basic PPE and cleaning supplies, while parents and community members resorted to a series of self-help measures to fill the gaps. As an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, I wrote and our Commission approved a Resolution that called for a regularly updated online dashboard to assure greater transparency regarding HVAC and air quality in school facilities, including both public and public charter schools. You can read the Resolution here: <https://resolutions.anc.dc.gov/ViewResolution.aspx?Id=Yxubcn4LSKDjHzx4QsJmA==>. While the District Department of General Services has instituted a dashboard, there is more work to be done. My Plan for Public Education as a Right talks at length about building safe and healthy schools including: Engaging in coordinated oversight of DC government agencies across Council committees to require proactive implementation of school safety measures by multiple agencies that affect the health and safety of our public schools, including the District Department of General Services for school facilities, playgrounds, and other public recreation spaces; the District Department of Energy and Environment for environmental hazards like lead and mold; and the District Department of Transportation for safe passage to school and traffic safety infrastructure; Requiring the Public Charter School Board and DC Public Schools to consider student safety in locating new schools or programmatic expansions including mechanisms for road and traffic safety and accelerated school zone safety improvements, and requiring the District Department of Transportation to conduct annual audits to certify school safety measures remain in a state of good repair; Engaging in oversight to ensure school modernizations are delivered efficiently and on budget and are not significantly more costly than other jurisdictions by requiring the District Department of General Services to develop a method to enforce cost control mechanisms for its projects and to include cost standards for school modernizations in master planning documents so more schools and students have access to modernized facilities; Including both accessibility and health and safety issues in the Capital Improvement Plan prioritization matrix for DC public school modernizations so that schools that are not ADA accessible or routinely face mold and lead challenges are prioritized for renovation and requiring regular audits and assessments for issues like accessibility and exposure to lead and mold in schools; and Requiring the Department of Energy and Environment to convene a taskforce and deliver a report with standards and recommendations on indoor air quality for schools and other public buildings that incorporates evidence on aerosol transmission of viruses in addition to pollution and other environmental toxins.

The financial outlook for the District has been impacted by the public health crisis, previous years of strong economic growth, and federal Rescue Plan funds. What do you think the three greatest fiscal challenges for D.C. public education will be over the next four years?

In DC, fully funding our public schools is a matter of will, not a matter of resources. DC is a city rich in resources, yet year after year, DC has failed to adequately fund our public schools. This means that schools have lost staff and resources or had to take money from other places – like targeted funding for students classified as “at-risk” – to fund basic needs. We must first adequately fund our schools and then ensure equity by enforcing the law that requires targeted “at-risk” funding to be supplemental. While individual schools do face specific and varying needs every year, the overarching patterns are clear and will likely continue to repeat themselves further without better DC Council oversight. Supplemental funds will be misused, schools will not have sufficient time or transparency to understand their budgets leading to the loss of critical staff, and schools most in need will bear the greatest burden. This pattern has not yet significantly changed during the pandemic despite recent strong economic growth or federal funds. Further, during the pandemic, family, child, and youth needs have grown enormously, contributing to shifts in enrollment that will have future school budget impacts. As Chairwoman, I will ensure that schools have the resources they need to serve students well and that the DC Council is doing a better job of overseeing both federal and local investments in public education. More specifically, this requires oversight, monitoring, and increased transparency around school funding of both local education agencies (LEAs), and schools within those LEAs. Even prior to the pandemic the DC Auditor’s Office highlighted inequity in our current model of enrollment-projection based funding and OSSEs UPSFF taskforce has highlighted the need to consider students facing more than one risk factor, among other recommendations. The truth is there is ample evidence to get started on improved oversight now. Using the many strategies described in my Council accountability and education plans I am committed to prioritizing this oversight and improvement.

Check on the statement below that best describes your position:	
I think D.C. policies should prioritize the DCPS system of by-right neighborhood schools.	X
I think D.C. policies should prioritize parental choice.	

Explain: As a parent who has navigated the school choice system multiple times, I know that choices alone do not equal equity and a system that perpetuates “winning and losing” in public education is doing something fundamentally wrong. We must ensure that we have a well-funded, by-right system of public schools. To be sure, it is also critical that our dual sector system collaborates effectively and transparently and that students and schools in both sectors are supported. In fact, we have seen our current system struggle – across sector lines – without a clear and coherent plan for school facilities and feeder patterns. And it is clear that our by-right schools serving students with the most need are frequently the most impacted, as noted in the DC Auditor’s Office report. Again, the many strategies described in my education plan articulate how better Council oversight is a critical missing link in supporting our entire system of public schools in the District.

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the strongest How strongly do you agree with this statement: The most effective system to ensure equitable quality for students and communities is a system of well-planned and supported DCPS feeder schools of right.	1
On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the strongest, how strongly do you agree with this statement: PK4 students should be able to enroll by-right into their neighborhood DCPS elementary schools.	1
Will you support convening a student assignment and boundary review process to be completed by 2023?	Yes

Comments: I support convening a student assignment and boundary review process and understand the importance and urgency required of this task. At-Large Councilmember Christina Henderson has introduced the Attendance Zone Boundaries Amendment Act of 2022, which would require a comprehensive review of boundaries and feeder patterns every ten years beginning in 2024. The DC Council will play an important roll in monitoring and overseeing this work if and when the bill becomes law.

Should DCPS have budget protections because of its responsibilities as the school system-of-right?	Yes
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Comments: It is clear from recent audits that DC Public Schools receives more students mid-year than public charter schools and that our current system of funding based on enrollment projections does not sufficiently account for this mid-year movement, nor does the enrollment stability fund. Further, it is clear that the incoming students often have more needs, and that these students are frequently concentrated in certain DC public schools. These schools need budget protections to adequately serve mobile and vulnerable populations ASAP. As Council Chairwoman, I am committed to acting on the evidence we have that clearly shows the need for DC Public Schools budget protections and better DC Public Schools budget oversight.

The DC Council transferred responsibility for school security in DCPS schools from MPD back to DCPS; DCPS will control its security guard contract this year; and MPD School Resource Officers will be reduced. How should the Council determine whether students are more safe and secure?

I agree with the DC Police Reform Commission: “The daily presence of police officers in schools is antithetical to environments meant to foster learning and positive development. Youth of color in particular often do not feel comfortable, valued, or safe in educational spaces where they are interacting with representatives of a system that generally views Black and Brown people as a threat.” Black and brown students bear the brunt of police presence in schools. Studies show that police in schools result in more arrests and suspensions of young (under the age of 14) children, decreased academic performance, and have mixed results as to student safety. As an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, I wrote and our Commission approved a Resolution that made many of the same recommendations as the Police Reform Commission (before the Commission issued its report), including similar recommendations regarding stopping the school to prison pipeline. You can read the Resolution here: <https://resolutions.anc.dc.gov/ViewResolution.aspx?Id=Rblui710/hwwNfY2zTDUjQ==>. In addition, I recognize that our schools have been underfunded and understaffed for so long that many schools rely on school security as additional staff, and administrators have reflected conflicting views. That’s why I believe the accompanying recommendation from the Police Reform Commission is so important – we must increase investments in community-competent, trauma-informed school-based mental health professionals. We can and should move away from police in schools and we must build up and invest in the system of supports our children and youth need. DC Public Schools are significantly understaffed as to social workers, counselors, and psychologists. As Chairwoman, I would work to reverse this chronic disinvestment, build new support systems, and work constantly to adjust and improve them as needed.

The DC Council must conduct rigorous oversight of the transition from the Metropolitan Police Department to DC Public Schools. The Council cannot simply assume this structural change is being done well and supporting our students. My DC Council Accountability Plan calls for a number of institutionalized, nonpartisan resources and better use of existing entities that provide additional research and expertise to assist the Council in making laws and conducting oversight, including: expanding dedicated, nonpartisan Committee support staff to ensure continuity, retention of institutional knowledge, and additional capacity to legislate and conduct oversight; re-instituting a comprehensive, nonpartisan, and objective research service to assist the Council in crafting legislative solutions to DC’s challenges, including robust consideration of best practices across jurisdictions; encourage holistic knowledge building across Council offices; help the Council better target public funds toward evidence-based programs; and supplement the research work of the Council’s Office of the Budget Director; enhancing and increasing the use of the DC Auditor’s Office, including through additional hearings on important audit findings and enhanced Committee consideration and use of recommendations, as a tool to ensure robust, consistent oversight to improve agency performance; and expanding the work of the Council Office of Racial Equity to include review of the DC budget and Council operations, as well as requiring the Council to respond to racial equity impact assessments, including providing its rationale for supporting or opposing legislation that maintains or worsens racial inequity. These structural improvements to the DC Council will allow it to conduct better oversight to ensure DC Public Schools are keeping students safe and secure.

Do you support any changes in the way the District of Columbia governs public education?	Yes
What governance reforms would you support for DCPS?	
A DCPS education policy board, appointed by the Mayor, confirmed by Council, with authority to hire and fire the chancellor.	Would consider
An elected DCPS education policy board of education, independent of the Mayor.	Would consider

Other ideas you would consider or support for DCPS:

DC Council oversight of education is deeply flawed. DC is the only jurisdiction where education governance is almost completely controlled by the Mayor, including our state education agency (the Office of the State Superintendent of Education). This structure means that Council oversight and independent data collection are essential to ensure any level of accountability. Yet, we have a Council that is under capacity by design as the current Council Chair dissolved the standalone Committee on Education as part of a petty fight with another Councilmember. I support stronger and more rigorous oversight of DC Public Schools through the increased use of professional Council staff and reforming the Education Committee. Importantly, as I discuss below, reconstituting and better supporting the Education Committee will allow for more opportunity to better support and monitor all of our Local Education Agencies through better oversight over our state education agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. That Office can and should be a critical agency through which we interact with DC Public Schools, and we should consider what authority, regulation, or guidance may be missing or lack clarity when thinking about how DC Public Schools is governed. I also support increasing the authority of the State Board of Education and, similarly, to codify the role and responsibilities of DC Public Schools Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) in law, including requiring that DC Public Schools provide LSATs with individual school budgets at least one month in advance. There is a lot to learn from other jurisdictions who have codified responsibilities in law, for their school advisory boards, like in Chicago. We should gather insight around what has worked and not worked to better support our LSATs and ensure they have the information they need at the right time and the authority to be truly heard.

What governance reforms would you support for the State Board of Education and the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE)?

State Board of Education with authority to hire and fire the State Superintendent of Education.

Would consider

State Board of Education with authority to initiate policy--not just approve it--in areas it already has jurisdiction over.

Would support

Other ideas you would consider or support for SBOE and/or OSSE:

My Plan for Public Education as a Right includes a number of proposals related to the State Board of Education and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, including: Broadening education authority and governance to increase the authority of the State Board of Education and, similarly, to codify the role and responsibilities of DC Public Schools Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) in law, including requiring that DC Public Schools provide LSATs with individual school budgets at least one month in advance; Calling for additional hearings (if necessary), reading, and a vote on two bills to increase the independence of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and clarify its responsibilities so DC can move forward with an improved system of checks and balances in public education; Ensuring that the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and the Office of the State Superintendent for Education respond with DC-wide policy adjustments to the recommendations in the Annual Reports of the DC Office of the Ombudsman for Education, as intended in the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, in particular to the many pending special education recommendations motivated by years of family complaints and requiring ample justification for recommendations they choose to not implement; and Requiring the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to report and publish data, as well as engaging with that data, regarding student academic success (absenteeism, achievement levels and growth, postsecondary enrollment), supportive school environment (mental health professionals and wellbeing, support for students with disabilities, English language learner supports, school climate survey data, and teacher retention and satisfaction), and community factors (student perceptions of safety and parent and caregiver satisfaction) that is not currently regularly collected and reported publicly for all students.

What governance changes would you consider or support for the D.C. Council?	
An Education Committee for the Council of the District of Columbia.	Would support
Council control over the level of charter enrollment and the number of charter schools.	Would support
Other changes you would consider or support D.C. Council governance of public education:	
<p>My DC Council Accountability Plan and my Plan for Public Education as a Right include a number of proposals related to DC Council governance of public education, including: Reconstituting the Council’s Education Committee to ensure consistent and dedicated oversight of and attention to DC’s public schools, including via dedicated Committee staff, particularly in light of persistent oversight challenges related to schools during the Covid-19 public health emergency and past efforts to establish additional education oversight; Instituting a neutral Committee membership and chair appointment process, such as seniority bidding, a process used by many legislative bodies across the country that adds stability, expertise, and neutrality and to avoid the appearance of impropriety (e.g., seeming to be motivated by obtaining a desired vote; punishing or rewarding Councilmembers for their vote; limiting certain Councilmembers from influencing specific issues); Expanding dedicated, nonpartisan Committee support staff to ensure continuity, retention of institutional knowledge, and additional capacity to legislate and conduct oversight; Re-instituting a comprehensive, nonpartisan, and objective research service to assist the Council in crafting legislative solutions to DC’s challenges, including robust consideration of best practices across jurisdictions; encourage holistic knowledge building across Council offices; help the Council better target public funds toward evidence-based programs; and supplement the research work of the Council’s Office of the Budget Director; Enhancing and increasing the use of the DC Auditor’s Office, including through additional hearings on important audit findings and enhanced Committee consideration and use of recommendations, as a tool to ensure robust, consistent oversight to improve agency performance; Expanding the work of the Council Office of Racial Equity to include review of the DC budget and Council operations, as well as requiring the Council to respond to racial equity impact assessments, including providing its rationale for supporting or opposing legislation that maintains or worsens racial inequity; and Ensuring that Council education hearings are inclusive of and accessible to educators, families, and students, by creating a clear, centralized website to share hearing notices, witness lists, and testimonies; permanently implementing virtual and hybrid options for Council proceedings; scheduling hearings with day, evening, and weekend options; and using timed panels and outreach to witnesses when it is time for them to testify; and Introducing legislation that would require a recurring percentage of education funds are set aside to build our local evidence base around what is working in public education in DC and for whom, managed by the Council research service office and committee staff, using best practices documented by both the National Conference on State Legislatures and the Pew Foundation’s work on evidence-based policymaking.</p>	
What governance reforms would you support for the Public Charter School Board (PCSB)?	
An elected Public Charter School Board.	Would consider
Public Charter School Board appointed by Ward Councilmembers and 3 at-large members appointed by the Mayor.	Would consider

Other reforms you would consider or support for PCSB:

Reinstating the Committee on Education will help the DC Council better exercise effective oversight over the entire public school system – both charter schools and traditional public schools. The Council needs the capacity to monitor and oversee activities across all Local Education Agencies, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the Public Charter School Board, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. Importantly, there is no effective oversight of DC Public Schools (one Local Education Agency) without effective oversight over the whole system (including all charter Local Education Agencies). That is simply illogical and, as we have seen, completely unsuccessful. All of our schools work together in an ecosystem and decisions made for one impact the others. In addition to including – and better tracking and monitoring – all Local Education Agencies through the DC Council’s reinstated Committee on Education, the Council also has legislative tools it is not using to better monitor the entire system. For example, the Master Facilities Plan, drafted by the Deputy Mayor for Education’s Office, is the planning document for all public school facilities across the District; yet, it has failed to meet legal requirements for many years. The current Council Chair has done absolutely nothing to address this failure. The Master Facilities Plan, if done well, and in accordance with legal requirements, has the potential to ensure an effective use of public school facilities and protect the future health and vitality of all our current schools.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B has asked for better planning around school facilities – not just for the health of schools but for the safety of children. Our kids deserve to get to school safely and too often schools are located for real estate reasons, not to be accessible or safe. This creates unsafe environments for children in schools – often who have no access to outdoor play space. Importantly, state education agencies also have responsibilities to the federal government for oversight of all Local Education Agencies and schools in the state. There is a huge opportunity in DC for better oversight over the whole public school system through better oversight of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, our state education agency. Multiple Councilmembers have shown the importance of the Office’s role in recent legislation that would adjust the Office’s governance in various ways. Regardless of if and how governance changes, these bills show the untapped potential for better oversight of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and why that is critical for the health of the entire system. There are multiple other DC laws that cover all Local Education Agencies, which provide several ways to do better oversight – from lead free water to attendance to school climate data. In sum, as Council Chairwoman I will leverage a deep understanding of current DC laws regarding education governance, combined with increased monitoring capacity, to conduct effective oversight of our entire public school system. Finally, as the mom to three public charter school students, I know that all children in the District’s schools deserve real oversight and governance. Transparency is important – around teacher compensation and policies for safety and health in particular. I love and trust my children’s school leadership and teachers, but experience has shown that we can’t always rely on trust alone for every school and every student – which is why it’s so important we engage in oversight as an expression of love and care for every DC student.