

Joe Weedon – Ward 6

Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities C4DC is a group of organizations representing every ward in the District, who have come together to advocate so children in all corners of our city have strong DCPS public schools in their neighborhoods as well as choices – from Pre-K through high school – that fully meet the needs of our students and our communities.

1. Why are you running for this office?

As a DC public school parent, I believe every family should have high-quality learning choices, including their neighborhood school. I'm running to support students - and the principals, teachers, parents, and families that help them succeed.

2. How will you engage your constituents, parents, teachers, students and the community?

I have been involved in our school systems for over a decade and regularly engage with student, teachers, parents and the community at our city's schools, at public meetings, and in the community. I also work closely with our Ward's councilmember, maintain regular electronic communication with constituents, and author columns for local publications on issues impacting our schools.

3. What qualifications do you bring to the office of State Board of Education, including your professional or personal experience with public education in our city?

4. Under Mayoral Control of education, in effect since 2007, the State Board of Education has very limited authority over policy. Do you believe their authority should be expanded? Yes No

I was elected in 2014 and bring nearly 20 years of experience in education and criminal justice policy and community organizing experience to the position. In addition to policy expertise, I have been involved at the school level, having served in a number of parent leadership positions. I am a member of the Eliot-Hine Middle School and Eastern High School Parent/Teacher Organizations (PTAs), and serve on the Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) at Eastern High School and the School Improvement Team (SIT) at Eliot-Hine Middle School. I have previously served on PTAs, SITs, and LSATs for other schools in the community.

While I support mayoral control over the public charter school board and DC Public Schools, we need common sense reforms that move us forward. This includes increasing accountability and transparency to ensure all students across our two-sector system are all well served. I am a leading proponent for greater independence for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and worked with my colleagues on the board and city council to move this conversation forward. I am also in favor of the establishment of an independent research collaborative to help our city build the capacity we need to solve the toughest problems facing our school systems. Additionally, the Board needs the ability to compel state agencies to respond to requests for information and to initiate policy. These reforms align with the 2015 evaluation conducted by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, which called for further reforms to ensure both our state agency and state board are empowered to function as effective agencies.

5. Should charter schools be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the open meetings laws for boards of directors? Yes No Please explain your answer.

Our city should hold our school systems to the highest standards of accountability and transparency. All local education agencies should be held to the same high standard.

6. In 2016 the State Board of Education made important recommendations for how schools in the District of Columbia should be judged as succeeding or not, consistent with the Federal ESSA (Every Child Succeeds Act). They included putting in place a star rating for each school - 1 to 5 stars. Do you believe the metrics proposed for that rating system capture school quality? Yes No

The accountability plan adopted by our city has its limitations. It will feature a one-through-five star rating system for every school that is based largely on test scores and attendance measures. On the board, I worked to improve the District's ESSA plan, leading efforts to increase the percentage of a school's score that is based on individual student growth and to incorporate metrics around school culture and to ensure a well-rounded academic learning environment. Ultimately, I did not believe our city's system moved far enough away from test scores and attendance as the primary indicators of school quality and I voted against the city's plan.

7. Last year, DCPS was embroiled in a series of scandals around graduation rates, leading to calls for an independent research entity to provide better analysis of how our schools are doing. Do you agree that such an entity, outside of the control of the Mayor, is needed? Yes or No

If yes, what do you think would be the most sensible model?

First, as a parent and a policy maker I was outraged by the city's graduation scandal and this scandal, more than any other, has undermined the trust of parents and community members. I was a leading proponent of the State Board's call for an independent investigation into the scandal and believe that our city needs to take further steps to ensure all diplomas from our city's high school carry the prestige that they should.

I support the establishment of an independent research collaborative to provide increased capacity in solving the toughest problems in our schools. The body should be collaborative, bringing together education agency leads, researchers, parents, and educators to listen, explore problems and help our city improve our work.

8. The State Board of Education voted on and approved the use in DC of the PARCC test to satisfy federal testing requirements under ESSA. Only 3 states and DC are now committed to using PARCC. Some states have advocated de-emphasizing standardized testing as the measure of success in education.

How do you view the role of standardized testing in DC schools?

Under federal law, the District is required to test students annually in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school (as a city, we administer this test in 10th grade). I support the common core state standards and believe that the PARCC is as valid a measure of student achievement as other standardized tests

that are available for this purpose. However, I believe that our city places too much weight on standardized testing as a measure of school success and as a result our schools spend too much time on test preparation.

9. Almost half DC students now attend public charter, not neighborhood, schools in the District of Columbia. We have over 200 publicly funded schools and 66 separate school systems (65 charter school systems and DCPS). Up to 20 new charter schools can open each year. Should the Council and/or Mayor have the authority to limit the expansion of charter schools? Yes No Please explain your answer.

It is critical for the success of our students and our schools that we have coordination across sectors. I believe that the mayor and council have and should exercise far more authority over the public charter school sector. Our city has many high-quality school options, both public and public charter, and many schools have long wait lists. However, we also have approximately 20,000 empty seats across the city. This tells me that the primary issue is not a lack of seats, but a lack of high-quality seats. To improve the schools that we have, we must invest in those schools and the students where they are. I do not believe that closing schools should be a deliberate strategy as closures disproportionately impact poor, minority students and research shows that students impacted by closures rarely do better academically after moving to a new school.

10. Should the Council and/or Mayor have authority over charter school siting (where they are located)? Yes No Please explain your answer.

The locations of our schools should be coordinated and planned to ensure that we have high-quality schools in every neighborhood. I also believe that local communities, through the ANC, should be more involved in the decision-making process, ensuring that issues relating to congestion and, most importantly, student safety are prioritized.

11. The following issues are of great concern in our city. Which of these issues do you think is most important and why? • Funding equity • School diversity/ integration • Giving disadvantaged student subgroups priority access to schools if they serve less than the district average • Expanding the number and support for educators of color.

Each of these issues is critical to the future success of our students and each is a priority for me over the coming four years. These issues are also very interrelated. Far too many students lack the same opportunities as their peers in different parts of the city and I believe that equity is the most pressing of these issues as well as the one which our city can make progress most rapidly. We start by ensuring that at-risk dollars follow students into schools and ensure that all students have access to the same educational opportunities as their more affluent peers. This is currently not the case in our city.

I do not believe that access to a high-quality school should be determined by a lottery ticket or someone's zip code and we need to enact policies, including more equitable funding and an at-risk/disadvantaged subgroup preference within the school lottery, to build high-quality, diverse schools across our city. The board recently released a research survey on teacher turnover, which will be a first

step towards a better understanding of our teacher workforce and the steps that we need to take to improve the diversity and preparation of our teachers.

12. The DC State Board of Education had a representative on the Mayor's Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force. Earlier this year, the task force put forward draft recommendations related to improving outcomes for at-risk students and creating a framework for coordinating planning decisions between DCPS and charter schools. Which recommendation do you think is the most important and why?

The Cross-Sector Task Force's work touched upon some of the most important issues facing our school systems. At a systems level, we need to ensure better coordination, joint-planning, and better use of common data. However, the most pressing issue facing students in the classroom today is the lack of equitable opportunity. As such, I believe the task force's work to identify and expand programs that effectively serve at-risk students and to reduce concentrated poverty in our schools are the most important - and most pressing - steps that need to be acted upon.

13. How should the SBOE hold the Office of the State Superintendent of Education accountable?

I support efforts to ensure that the Office of the State Superintendent is independent of the mayor and accountable to the public. As our city moves forward, our state educational agency must be more engaged and accountable to the State Board of Education and the agency must be resourced and empowered to review data and make its own conclusions.

The Board has and will continue to hold the Office of the State Superintendent of Education accountable. As a Board, we called for an independent investigation into the graduation crisis and led city-wide calls to ensure that data on student achievement gaps is more transparent and confronted. As a representative on the Board of Education, I led these efforts and will continue to work to hold our other education leaders accountable for their work through tough questions during public meetings, requests for information on the issues confronting our city's educational systems, and by working with colleagues on the city council to ensure their oversight is effective.