

# King County Democrats 2023 Endorsement Questionnaire

**Name**

Gina Topp

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**Phone number**

(253) 691-0135

**Candidate name**

Gina Topp

**Candidate pronouns**

she/her

**Candidate name pronunciation**

j EE n uh

**Campaign Filer\_Name**

Friends of Gina Topp

**Campaign email**

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(253) 691-0135

**Campaign website**

<https://ginatopp.com>

**Link to candidate headshot**

<https://ginatopp.com/about-gina>

**Treasurer name**

Andy Lo

**Treasurer email**

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**Treasurer phone**

(206) 335-8815

**What type of position are you running for?**

School

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Seattle School District No. 1

**Are you a Democrat?**

Yes

**Have you ever been a member of another political party?**

No

**Have you ever been found in violation of a Public Disclosure Commission, Federal Election Commission, or Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission regulation?**

No

**Do you have a code of conduct for campaign staff and volunteers?**

Yes

**If you have campaign staff, do you support them joining a labor union?**

Yes

**Do you support employees of your jurisdiction (e.g. your city's employees, the Port's employees, etc.) exercising their collective bargaining rights without fear of retaliation, including the right to bargain and strike for better working conditions and pay?**

Yes

**Are you willing to have yourself, your staff, and your peers undergo training to understand and combat institutional racism, implicit bias, and sexual harassment?**

Yes

**Will your campaign accept contributions from corporate fossil fuel PACs?**

No

**Will your campaign accept contributions from corporate pharmaceutical PACs or corporate health insurance PACs?**

No

**Will your campaign accept contributions from corporate building industry PACs, including the Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW) and the National Association of Home Builders?**

No

**Will your campaign accept contributions from law enforcement or sheriffs' organizations?**

No

**Will you return contributions from companies or PACs who are aligned with the organizations listed above and others that conflict with Democratic Party values?**

Yes

**Have you made any donations to Republican candidates or Republican Party organizations in the last 5 years?**

No

**Have you previously participated, or will you be participating, in a candidate training program like Institute for a Democratic Future or Emerge?**

No

**Please describe your background (education, employment, community and civic activity, union affiliation, and political activity).**

As former chief legal counsel and policy advisor to the King County Executive, I managed complex policy and budget challenges – working to prioritize equity, accountability, and delivery of services. My role included oversight of the courts, climate action, and helping to build levies including the Conservation Futures Tax and Best Starts for Kids. After I had my daughter, I opened my own private law firm that works with start-ups, small businesses, and nonprofits.

I have served as Chair, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian of the 34th District Democrats, as well as PCO for my precinct. I serve on the board of the West Seattle Rotary Club, and the Southwest Sports Complex, which hosts no-to-low cost tennis camps for children in Southwest Seattle.

I am a triple Husky, having received my B.S. in Biology, Juris Doctor, and Master of Tax Law from the University of Washington. I remain connected to my alma mater through teaching seminar classes on local government policy dilemmas and serving on the UW Alumni Gold Council.

**What motivated you to run for this position and how would you evaluate your success?**

Growing up in Washington, I experienced firsthand the struggles of our underfunded schools. Still, my life was transformed by the teachers and counselors who went above and beyond to support me. Now, as I prepare to send my daughter into the same underfunded system, like many other parents, I'm worried.

Seattle Public Schools faces a staggering \$131 million budget shortfall for the 2024-2025 school year. The board is discussing cutting buses and music programs, laying off teachers, and even closing schools. It's clear we need experienced leaders prepared to tackle these issues head-on with innovative solutions and an unwavering commitment to our kids.

In measuring success, I'd look at a range of tangibles:

> Retain teachers and employees

- > Increase enrollment and graduation rates
- > Minimize budget cuts to key services
- > Optimize access to IEP and special education services
- > Collect and respond to student, parent, and community ratings of schools and district
- > Improve the quality and range of services that prepare students for career and college
- > Obtain data on adult outcomes of Seattle Public Schools graduates and adapt policy accordingly

**What are the top three issues of urgency that you will address if elected?**

My top priorities will be:

- 1) Ensuring equity in education for all students, regardless of their background, so that every student has the opportunity to succeed;
- 2) Empowering educators through comprehensive support, fostering their professional growth, and recognizing their critical role in shaping our children's future;
- 3) Cultivating safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments, where every student feels valued and respected;
- 4) Engaging parents and communities to create a collaborative educational system that restores confidence in the governance of our district and reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of our city.

**How will you involve all residents and engage all communities in the decision-making process?**

Parents have busy lives – many don't have time to attend board meetings but still want (and deserve) to be involved in the decisions impacting them and their children's lives. The full board should make town halls available in-person AND virtually at a range of times so that everyone interested can find a way and time to participate that works for them.

Beyond public town halls and making myself available to talk with groups and 1:1 in person, via phone, or by email, I'd like to make sure we're actively seeking input from folks who do not know that they can reach out to us. Importantly, I'd like to expand family participation in the annual school climate survey. Students fill out the survey during class time, but parents are not always surveyed. Our local government agencies routinely conduct live phone surveys of residents to inform their decision-making- Seattle Public Schools should do the same.

**How have you promoted an enduring environment of inclusivity, diversity, and equity?**

One significant accomplishment that showcases my work toward achieving social justice was overseeing the transformation of the inquest program at King County. An inquest is a public airing of facts and circumstances following an officer involved shooting. Working closely with families who have lost loved ones, community leaders, and law enforcement officers, I collaborated to create a program that was not only more equitable but also more transparent. One impactful measure that made the process more equitable was providing attorneys to support the families involved.

Furthermore, I deeply recognize the privilege I possess and understand that my personal experiences differ from those who have endured consistent marginalization. This awareness means that it will be a priority for me to seek diverse counsel from community leaders. I will continuously work to expand my knowledge and understanding, and bridge those gaps.

**If elected, how will you address inequalities experienced among BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, or other marginalized communities and advance an agenda of equality?**

I acknowledge my privileged position in being able to run for the School Board, which is a voluntary role. This financial barrier often excludes individuals from marginalized communities from running for the School Board.

It is essential to recognize that addressing the inequities experienced by BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized communities requires their active involvement in the decision-making processes and ensuring they have the necessary resources to participate. To achieve this, I am committed to prioritizing diverse perspectives and seeking counsel from individuals representing these communities.

Some of the inequalities that need immediate attention are the disproportionate discipline students of color face, higher rates of middle schoolers who feel their classes don't relate to their cultures, and creating a culture of appreciating diverse identities. Over 1 in 10 SPS students now identify as gender-diverse. It's time to talk through how we are preparing teachers and admin to support them on their journeys of self-discovery.

**Do you support charter schools and/or vouchers for private/religious school education?**

No

**Do you support supplemental funding for International Baccalaureate & Advanced Placement testing for low-income students?**

Yes

**Do you support salary increases for teachers and paraprofessionals?**

Yes

**Do you support continuing and expanding art, music, physical education, and library classes?**

Yes

**Do you support enhancing awareness of the option for parents to 'opt out' their students from military recruitment activities?**

Yes

**What policies or changes will you seek to ensure that all students receive an education that enables them to reach their fullest potential?**

I am committed to policies and changes that empower every learner to receive an education that enables them to reach their fullest potential. To achieve this I will prioritize several key measures: I will work towards reducing educational disparities by addressing resource inequalities.

I will emphasize the importance of personalized education, recognizing that each student has unique needs and learning styles.

I will encourage the integration of modern technologies in the classroom to enhance learning experiences and prepare our students for the 21st-century workforce.

I will prioritize access to mental health counseling to support students' overall well-being and put processes in place to identify those in need of services. Unfortunately, as we have seen across the country, a lack of processes for identifying and appropriately handling mental health crises has exacerbated violence and mass shootings in our schools.

I will prioritize comprehensive support and training for teachers to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom.

Lastly, I will emphasize the significance of inclusive education, fostering an environment that celebrates diversity and promotes tolerance. By implementing anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies, we can create safe spaces where students feel accepted and respected, enabling them to focus on their studies and personal growth.

**How will you address equity in discipline, particularly regarding school resource officers?**

Ensuring student safety is crucial, particularly considering tragic incidents like the one at Ingraham High School. The Seattle School Board's response to these concerns has been inadequate.

In 2020, the Seattle School Board rightly imposed an indefinite moratorium on SROs, who were armed Seattle police officers stationed in our schools. This moratorium remains in effect today. Instead, non-uniformed security specialists, who are not police officers, work with school principals to address safety matters. These specialists need to contribute to creating a welcoming environment for students. They should possess an understanding of the student body, staff, and families, enabling them to effectively identify any unusual activities. It is crucial that these safety specialists be members of the communities they serve.

Even without SROs the issue of racial disparities in disciplinary responses persists and must be addressed. Black students in Washington are more likely to be expelled and be suspended. We need to think critically and get to the root causes. We need to assess which infractions truly justify removing a student from their classroom, which only contributes to the achievement gap, as well as include parents, teachers, students, and admin in conversations about why the infraction happened in the first place.

**What will you do to advocate for ample and equitable funding for K-12 education including special education, school nurses, counselors, mental health professionals, and paraeducators?**

To fix our school funding problems, we must address the underlying issue of Washington's regressive tax structure. Our tax system has remained largely unchanged since the Great Depression when our economy relied on resources such as salmon, timber, and other commodities. Today, our economy has evolved, and it is unacceptable that one of the most prosperous regions in the country struggles to fund education and other essential services.

As an attorney with a Masters in Tax Law, I am not only deeply passionate about how we fund education, but I bring expertise to the table. Drawing upon my expertise, I am committed to working tirelessly with a coalition of school board directors, local officials, and state legislators to develop a tax system that is based on ability to pay, that is fair, and that meets the needs of the 21st century.

Some possible avenues could include: broadening the sales tax to include a wider range of modern economic transactions; taxing unearned income (progress has been made by the legislature through the implementation of a capital gains tax); addressing concerns with the Business and Occupation tax; and expanding property tax relief for homeowners based on their income.

**Nation-wide, we have seen examples of parents objecting to books in school libraries with subjects that include racial injustice, the experience of BIPOC communities, and LGBTQIA+ perspectives. How will you address the concerns of these parents and uphold your district's policies?**

Seattle Public Schools should not be censoring diverse perspectives, no matter how uncomfortable confronting the history and realities of America may be to some. Parents have chosen to send their children to a public school in a nation that is founded on principles of free speech, and should expect that age-appropriate diverse experiences will be discussed in school and in books offered in school libraries.

What is considered age-appropriate is up for discussion – particularly in regard to content with themes that deal with sexuality and violence. LGBTQIA+ identities, racism, and the history of our country, are critical topics that can and should be discussed in age-appropriate ways.

**Environmental concerns impact students differently depending on the location of their homes and the maintenance of their school buildings. Provide examples of your climate justice actions to date and your specific plans for school-related environmental equity for all enrolled students.**

During my time at King County, I oversaw the Executive's climate office and played a key role in implementing the County's Climate Action Plan – one of the most ambitious climate plans in the nation. Under my management, the County worked toward electrification of the Metro fleet, greening the built environment, and setting a goal to plant or save 3 million trees. I'm particularly proud of the plan's new section on environmental justice, which was co-created with frontline communities that have historically borne the brunt of pollution and lack of access to green spaces.

One of the most impactful days of my career was when I visited a community without access to green spaces or parks, only a concrete fenced-in lot. Upon opening the gates to the lot, an astonishing number of children flooded into the space. We were announcing the arrival of a new park for the area, and I had the privilege of spending the rest of the day playing with those kids. This experience reinforced my belief that every child deserves access to parks and green spaces. That's why I worked to secure funding for King County's Land Conservation Initiative, which aims to preserve our most important natural lands and urban green spaces while creating open spaces in underserved communities.

I will continue to push for innovative and ambitious environmental policies to support students' well-being today and for generations to come.

**CERTIFICATION: I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate.**

Yes

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