

## **PA PAC Questionnaire for Durham Board of Education - 2022**

Please return the completed form along with your resume or biographical statement describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience, as well as a high-resolution headshot of yourself as soon as possible, but by Sat Mar 19 at 5pm, at the latest.

Please e-mail your responses to PAC Coordinators at [papacboard@googlegroups.com](mailto:papacboard@googlegroups.com) by Saturday, March 19 at 5pm.

Please note that following the Saturday, March 19 at 5pm deadline, the People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

When answering this questionnaire, please repeat the questions in your response document with each question numbered and organized as it appears here. Type your responses in italics, bold, or a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. Do not use colors or shading.

Please try to confine your responses to no more than 300 words unless another word limit is indicated. Do not feel obliged to exhaust the limit for each question.

If you use words or ideas from another person, please attribute your source.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and your willingness to serve the people of Durham.

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1. What are the three most important issues facing Durham Public Schools? What are your top priorities in addressing these issues?

- 1. Racial equity: This includes addressing the disparate academic outcomes for students of color; hiring of teachers of color, particularly Latinx teachers and Black male teachers; ensuring avenues of communication for parents of color, particularly low-income and working class parents; monitoring and increasing BIPOC students' opportunities for academic and other forms of enrichment.**
- 2. LGBTQ+ student support: Given the current attacks on LGBTQ+ students and families in other states, it is critical that our district implement policy that protects them. This includes developing policy that sets a standard for our responsibility to gender nonconforming students, LGBTQ+ students, and LGBTQ+ families.**
- 3. Improving teacher working conditions and wellness: We must build upon and develop plans to ensure adequate staffing, sufficient planning time, additional**

**financial compensation where appropriate and possible, and opportunities for support, mentoring, and professional development.**

**These three issues are both timely and foundational to the success of our district in meeting its mission to embrace, educate, and empower every student to innovate, serve, and lead. We must address disparities that negatively affect Black, Latinx, LGBTQ+ students, groups which are overlapping and not mutually exclusive, and to support the educators who are on the frontlines of educating, supporting, and mentoring our students.**

2. Durham Public Schools has a commitment to and focus on equity. Name one systemic racial equity issue that impacts students of color in Durham Public Schools. How will you use your seat on the board to rectify this issue?

**One systemic racial equity issue affecting students of color in Durham Public Schools is the mental health effects of racism. While schools too often perpetuate racism, we can work to make them safe spaces where students receive the support they need to navigate and heal from racial trauma. In recent years there has been more research on racial trauma and racial stress and their effects, which include both mental effects, such as anxiety and diminished confidence, and physical effects, such as sleep difficulties. Racism in school communities manifests in many different ways, including microaggressions, implicit bias, inequitable access, as well as through more overt avenues, including more or harsher discipline. For example, nationally, Black boys are four times more likely than white boys to be suspended or expelled from school (Bell, James R., 2016). In North Carolina, Black students made up 25% of the student body and yet 54.1% of all suspensions in 2018-2019 (DPS Office of Equity Affairs, 2021). The Office of Equity Affairs has made strong efforts at addressing racism in schools by creating racial equity training opportunities and most recently, developing the Equity Policy released in 2021. This is an important step in addressing this issue. As a board member, I would continue to ensure funding for the Office of Equity Affairs, racial equity training, and robust support services for students and families (including bilingual counselors, social workers, nurses, and translators), and to provide accountability and support for the execution of the Equity Policy.**

3. The North Carolina Standard Course of Study in Social Studies requires teachers to facilitate conversations about race and racism in the United States. How would you respond to parents and other community members who want to see this history removed from what is taught in the classroom?

**The construct of race as we understand it today and the creation of racism are fundamental to the founding of this nation. This country would not have been built in the way that it was without the genocide and displacement of Indigenous people and the forced migration and labor of Africans and African descendent people. I believe that schools have the potential to be spaces of healing for this painful history. As with any painful past, it can be hard to face and process; yet, we are better for it in the long-term. Furthermore, I believe that all students have a right to learn about the histories, communities, and politics of people who share their identities, and thus, it is our responsibility as educators to continue to diversify our curriculum. This means addressing race and racism in classrooms in age appropriate ways that do not cause stigma or blame, but rather allow students to understand, discuss, and analyze racism in an open and honest way.**

**A large part of my work has been to provide avenues for teachers and students to address racial oppression in big and small ways. For example, while serving as the Outreach Program Coordinator for the Consortium in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University, I co-founded and from 2014-2018 co-directed the African Diaspora Studies Program (ADFP) with Dr. Kia Caldwell. ADFP was a professional development program for middle and high school English language arts, social studies and world language teachers that involved a summer institute and curriculum development project. This program, a collaboration between university partners, DPS, and NCDPI, aimed to increase teachers' knowledge of African, Afro-Latin American, and African American studies. We addressed race and racism in different regional contexts. Teachers learned about Black histories in the U.S. and the ways they were similar and different to those within Latin America. They also learned about how Black individuals and communities in different regions used their voices and agency to resist racism, organize, and build community. Out of our work developing ADPF, Dr. Caldwell and I co-edited a book called *Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education*, which offers both scholarly articles and topical curriculum guides that educators can use to increase teaching of Black histories and the African diaspora.**

**Providing resources for teachers to learn and thoughtfully teach about race and racism is something I care deeply about and will continue to advocate for.**

4. What is your take on how restorative justice programs (as an alternative to punitive disciplinary measures) are being implemented in DPS? What successes and challenges have you seen so far?

**The institution of Restorative Practice Centers in DPS in 2019 was an important step in reducing disparities in discipline (across race/ethnicity, SES, and dis/ability) as well as giving more attention to the social and emotional learning of our students. Implementing these Centers has brought more awareness to restorative justice and the positive role it can play in the holistic development of our students. I had the opportunity to take a two-day restorative justice training while serving in the role of Center for Multicultural Affairs Associate Director at Duke University and to serve on the university's Restorative Justice Task Force. I value the role that restorative practices can play in supporting our district's students and helping them to develop critical skills in reflection, perspective taking, communication, and decision making, and I would like to see this work continue.**

**At present, more funding and time for training around restorative practices is needed so that there is a consistent understanding of the role of the Restorative Practice Centers and the approaches that should be used within them. Ideally, we want all school personnel to be able to learn about restorative practices so that they can support this model in their respective roles.**

5. What is the role of the BOE? What kind of leadership style do you prefer for the board?

**The school board oversees and supports the work of the superintendent, ensuring that the metrics of the strategic plan are being met and if not, asking critical questions to understand what the barriers are in meeting the objectives of the strategic plan and how we can address them.**

**The school board is responsible for the district's budget and for establishing spending priorities, making sure that these are in line with our mission, values, goals, and vision.**

**Additionally, the school board is responsible for listening to the individuals they most directly serve, students and parents/guardians. The school board should advocate for and support avenues by which they and the staff of the district can listen to their constituencies and address concerns at the organizational level where appropriate. The board should also discern what are the most urgent, common, and/or key priorities within the issues raised.**

**As a board member, my leadership style would be collaborative and direct. I use both quantitative and qualitative data and research to develop my analysis on issues as well as to propose potential solutions. I value relationships and intend to work cohesively with our board members. I believe that we can come to the best decisions when we are able to have open and honest conversation, adhering to agreed upon norms for our communication. I**

**bring a wealth of expertise in education and would draw upon this while also being committed to continually learning and growing from all of those around me. Having an aspirational vision for what our education system can do and be while also being accountable, practical, and realistic is important to me as I think about my potential role on the school board.**

6. What is your view of how DPS Central Office should work with school administrators and staff? How will you encourage the superintendent to train and support building leaders to be responsive to students, parents, and staff?

**Though the vision, plan, and policy of the district and the board are important, they do not necessarily translate to change or full implementation within schools. Central Office should ensure that school-level leaders are accountable for implementing district-level policies and also provide the support and resources for them to do so (for example, in the case of implementing Restorative Practice Centers).**

**We should understand that being responsive to students, parents, and staff is an equity issue, as those individuals with the most resources and privilege are often listened to with more urgency than those who are either less resourced or hold less social privilege due to race, SES, or other factors. It is important to talk about this when we discuss our communication and response practices. The Board, the Superintendent, and Central Office staff can also model the appropriate kind of responsiveness that we desire to see among building leaders at the school level.**

7. Charter schools are controversial. What role do you think they should play in our community?

**It is important to be aware of the role that charter schools play in the educational landscape. Charter schools are indeed controversial and have been since they began to take off in the late 1990s. On the one hand, they offer increased school choice and often specialized programming for students, families and teachers who desire it. On the other hand, they utilize public funds for schools that are not required by law to be as accessible or equitable as the district public schools are required to be. Charter schools should be held to the same standards that district schools are held to, given that they receive public funds,**

**and this includes providing free transportation, free and reduced lunch, and offering services for students with special needs. Given that charter schools provide various curricular offerings that often draw families away from the district, at a district level we should think about how we can continue to offer rigorous and diverse academic programming that is desirable to students and parents and maintains interest and participation in our district's schools.**

8. What is your goal and plan for sustaining and increasing the level of support staff (nurses, counselors, psychologists, social workers) in our schools?

**Especially at this time, it is critical that we attend to the need for support staff such as nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists in our schools. Many students have experienced increased stress and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a school system we must give this attention, as these factors also impact our students' ability to learn and perform academically.**

**In the short term, I would like to work with fellow board members and with our County Commissioners to prioritize this need in our budget. Some COVID relief funds provided to hire additional support staff will run out, and we need to have a plan for addressing any shortfall.**

**In the long-term, I would like to see DPS continue to partner with local community colleges and universities to support the development of school support staff, especially staff of color and bilingual staff.**

9. Choose one of the following topics and address it through an equity lens:

- redistricting
- virtual learning
- COVID-19 pandemic
- community engagement

**The COVID pandemic has highlighted the significant role schools play in intervening in economic disparities, which fall along racial lines. Without the physical school as a resource for DPS students during the first year and a half of the pandemic, many students suffered from isolation and anxiety. Even with the best virtual learning lessons and classrooms, it proved difficult to provide extra academic support to all the students who needed it.**

**Additionally, the lack of extracurricular activities prohibited many students from developing non-academic interests and skills. These are issues that have affected students of all identities and backgrounds. However, those families who were better resourced during the pandemic were better equipped to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on their children. In Durham, 28.94% of the Hispanic population and 19.22% of the Black population live in poverty, as compared to 7.7% of the white population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). We can deduce from this data alone that students of color were more vulnerable to the negative effects, both academic and otherwise, during the pandemic. Black, Native, and Latinx people and families have also been disproportionately affected by the effects of COVID in terms of deaths and hospitalizations. Overall, in the context of the pandemic, economic disparities have been exacerbated, creating greater housing and food insecurity among low-income communities, which are disproportionately Black, Latinx, and Native.**

**I think that it is important that we are attentive to these facts as we make decisions and that we create policies with our most vulnerable students in mind. DPS has done a good job practicing our value of equity in making technology accessible to all students, for example, by providing laptops to all students and hotspots to those students who did not have internet, and this is something we should continue to do.**

**We especially must continue to support our students' mental health needs. Anecdotally, it seems that there are more students at all grade levels who have presented with moderate to severe mental health concerns over the last two years than was previously the case. Our students need more care, academic enrichment, and opportunities for positive social development than ever. In this vein, I would advocate for more counselors and social workers in schools, including bilingual professionals, and more mental health resources for students.**

10. List two skills and one life experience that you feel you bring to the board.

**Skill #1: I am a bridge-builder. Real and meaningful collaboration is important to me in making change in education. This requires listening. It requires effective communication and emotional intelligence. In leading or participating in groups, I try to bring out the expertise of each individual. I also try to facilitate individuals' being able to listen to one another.**

**Skill #2: I bring data analysis abilities to the board. I look at quantitative and qualitative data to develop recommendations and make informed decisions. I want our decisions as a board to be strategic in nature, research-based, and aligned with our values.**

**Life experience: My desire to be an educator began when I served as a servant leader (teaching intern) with CDS Freedom Schools in North Philadelphia in the summer of 2000. That summer I had the opportunity to go to the CDF Alex Haley Farm for the servant leader training, where I learned alongside hundreds of other young adults about the history of Black U.S. Americans and civil rights in the U.S. I met college-age young people of color like myself who wanted to work with children and make a difference in their lives. Back in Philadelphia I immersed myself in the process of creating culturally relevant activities for Black and Latinx students, piquing their curiosity in reading, and creating opportunities for them to learn more about their own histories and identities. The experience of teaching that summer was challenging yet so deeply rewarding. When I returned to Swarthmore College in the fall I changed my major to include Education, and that is how I began the path to becoming a teacher. I served as a Freedom Schools servant leader all three summers of college, and I later co-founded a Freedom School summer program for students in grades 3-10 at NCCU in 2007. Racial equity and the potential of youth empowerment are at the core of why I became an educator and continue to desire to make long-lasting change for youth and the teachers that serve them.**

11. If you have children, where did they attend K-12 school?

**I raised three children for seven years, and during that time, they attended Central Park School for Children, E.K. Powe Elementary, Chewing Middle School, Lucas Middle School, and Durham School of the Arts.**

12. How should we leverage public resources to promote carbon neutrality? For example, what can practically be done with aging bus fleets, school buildings, and so on to move toward this goal? How do we turn our schools green?

**Prioritizing what is needed to keep our staff and students safe and learning in an optimum environment is important, as is doing the above in a "green" way. There have been multiple instances in the last year of school where classrooms and buildings had air flow problems or malfunctioning air conditioners, some even resulting in school closures. As we replace malfunctioning equipment, we should look to invest in doing so with more sustainable and efficient solutions. I applaud DPS for their increased focus on energy savings over Winter Break, resulting in energy and cost savings. If elected, this is an area**

**where I would like to learn more so that I can make appropriate policy recommendations that promote carbon neutrality in our daily operations.**

13. Would you support a renewable energy bond that trained and hired Durham residents to develop infrastructure for renewable energy on all DPS properties?

**I would support a renewable energy bond that trained and hired Durham residents to develop infrastructure for renewable energy on all DPS properties, provided it were sound in design and centered equity. Community partnerships and communities in schools initiatives like this have widespread benefits for students, families, staff, and the Durham community at large. We also need to move beyond quick fixes in order to ensure DPS' long-term infrastructure stability. We should move beyond "survival" thinking when it comes to our buildings and programs and instead think about what will allow for students, staff, families, and communities to thrive.**

14. What is your stance on the minimum wage, including what you consider to be a livable wage? What will you do to make this a reality for all DPS employees? After recent progress on increased wages for DPS employees, including janitors, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers, what more do you think should be done?

**I believe that a living wage is important; it is something that I advocated for and worked to establish within one of my previous work environments. I have found the Living Wage Calculator (<https://livingwage.mit.edu>) to be a helpful resource when thinking about what makes a living wage. With year to year inflation as well as the quickly rising costs of living in Durham, not the least of which is housing, I think we need to continue to consider what wages are adequate for our staff members. I was very proud when, in 2018, the DPS school board voted to bring custodial workers in-house, rather than contracting with an outside vendor, in order to pay those workers more and provide better benefits. This decision came at a cost of over \$1 million to the district, but, it was determined, would yield better results in terms of worker stability and quality of service, in addition to being in line with DPS' value of equity.**

**I would continue to keep top of mind the labor, experiences, and needs of our custodial staff, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and other DPS workers who are often overlooked yet whose labor is key to the functioning of our schools. I am aware that many of these individuals are not only DPS staff but DPS parents as well. We should continue to regularly examine what wages and benefits are fair and equitable for DPS staff and make changes as appropriate.**

15. What will you do to support more technical and career development?

**I have seen the impact that our technical and career development programs have had on students. The Cosmetology program and Business Finance Academy programs were both at Hillside while I taught there (Cosmetology then moved to Holton), and we have several other excellent specialty schools and programs, including the Barbering program at Holton, the Riverside High School Engineering Pathway, and Northern High School's Culinary program. These are some of the gems of our district, and I would like our district to continue to support these programs as well as to expand our offerings as possible. Durham's students would benefit from even more opportunities to explore career options, including those that don't require a traditional college pathway after high school. In this vein, I would like to continue to partner with Durham Tech, Durham County's Cooperative Extension, and others that provide creative ways for students to explore pathways of interest, participate in internships, and engage in certificate programs before they graduate.**

16. Do you support the expansion of the BETC (Bionomic Educational Training Center) program? If so, how will you work to expand it? If not, why?

**I am new to learning about the Bionomic Education Training Center. I like that it provides ways for students to apply their learning about STEM concepts in a real-life and impactful context, and I am highly supportive of the intention to develop environmentally literate young people. As a partnership with the Durham County Soil and Water Conservation District, it allows for DPS to bring in additional resources and expertise for the benefit of our students and teachers. For these reasons, I would likely support the expansion of the BETC as resources allow.**

17. Please list what you feel are your relevant prior employment and/or volunteer experiences.

**I taught high school for six years, including four years at Hillside High School and one semester at the Durham Performance Learning Center. As an educator I learned about and navigated many systemic social, political, and economic issues that affected my students. I sought to support my students, making space for them to fully pursue their academic curiosities and goals while being their authentic selves.**

**I have now been an education practitioner for over fifteen years with a unique and diverse background in the field of education. I have taught and advised students from sixth grade through college, coordinated and created professional development for teachers, worked in university student affairs, and served as a DEI elementary and middle independent school administrator. Having worked in public, charter, and private schools, I have been able to observe the practices and cultures in these schools and students' home communities that shape youths' access to academic and other types of resources.**

**Some of the major projects I have collaboratively developed are the African Diaspora Fellows Program, which aimed to increase teachers' knowledge of African, Afro-Latin American, and African American studies; Learning through Languages, an annual high school world language research symposium; Connecting the Americas, a 10-day study tour for elementary teachers to Yucatán, Mexico; and an artist residency that engaged high school, community college and college students in Durham featuring Mexico City-based print-maker Sergio Sánchez Santamaría. In all of these projects I have worked with DPS teachers and/or students. I currently work as the Project Director for DREAM, a UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education program created in partnership with DPS to recruit and retain teachers of color and those from underrepresented backgrounds for DPS.**

**In addition to these roles, I have served on a number of committees and boards, including Safe Schools NC from 2017-2019, which provides resources to educators to better address the needs of LGBTQ youth. I also served as a member of and co-chaired the Durham Public Schools Budget Process Advisory Committee in 2016-2018, which sought to align budgetary decisions with district priorities, including racial equity. Throughout my career I have held positions that allowed me to directly address social inequities, increase culturally responsive practices, and promote social justice in schools and in the field of education, affecting the lives of many students, families, and educators.**

18. Does your campaign have specific policies regarding from whom it accepts donations? Please specifically detail any contributions from corporations to your current and prior campaigns. How do you see the influence of donors on policy, both for yourself and for others?

**At this point, we do not have developed specific policies regarding from whom we will accept donations. However, I would not accept funds from anyone or any entity that would compromise my integrity to do what I believe is in the best interests of our students and in alignment with what our community wants and needs. This is a campaign born from my relationships with and commitment to the stakeholders of District 1 and Durham, not outside interests.**

19. For whom did you vote in the 2020 United States Senate and presidential elections?

**In 2020 I voted for Cal Cunningham for U.S. Senate and for President Joe Biden for president.**