

# 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?**

The top 3 issues facing Durham Public Schools include a lack of consistent policies, a need for shared leadership structures, and a need to increase recruitment and retention of diverse candidates.

My top priorities in addressing these issues will be to remain connected and rooted in community conversations about school leadership. One of the first steps for me would be to expand the Bull City Community Schools Partnership to at least one middle and one high school. This expansion would require a complete needs assessment that would include parents and community partners. Using this model requires an investment from school principals to share decision making with parents, educators, and community partners. This is in line with Priority 4 of the DPS Strategic Plan to Strengthen School, Family, and Community Engagement.

Increasing shared leadership structures across the district will help to increase the working conditions, which is my second priority. All school workers will have a say in policies and practices in their working conditions. DPS needs to see shared policies for working hours, compensation, access to resources, and breaks for all levels of staff such as bus drivers, instructional assistants, teachers, etc. This will help make sure all school workers have the ability to have family time and the ability to handle life expenses.

Improved community engagement and better working conditions will help with retention of school workers. Increasing our own programming to include incentives for high school students and school workers that are already engaged with DPS would be the next priority for me. Creating a pipeline of educators that allows employees to remain employed and get certified at the same time increases more inclusion for people of color that may be unable to choose higher education over their work.

**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?**

Durham Public Schools, like all public school systems, were never designed to benefit students of color, Durham has done a tremendous amount of work in this area, but the systemic failures are still very present and work against our Black and brown youth daily. One example of this is in student discipline, which still shows a substantial gap among races. I would be remiss if I didn't talk about student engagement in the classroom first.

I have worked with the Bull City Community Schools Partnership from the start in Durham, and am a huge advocate for this model of learning, but most especially a culturally relevant curriculum. Programs at Club Boulevard and Lakewood Elementary Schools have made tremendous gains in this area, including books with diverse characters that represent all of our students. Many of our school media centers and classroom libraries remain whitewashed and cannot engage our Black and brown students in their current state. This is just one example of how our classrooms are not engaging all students in learning, with many others denying access to AIG and Advanced Placement classes, and teachers' implicit bias that makes them less likely to be affirming to students of color. Continuing to support the Bull City Community Schools Partnership, I will seek an expansion to more elementary and middle schools as a member of the board. By partnering with all stakeholders and creating a culturally relevant curriculum, we can begin to engage students of color in the classroom.

**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?**

I want to be clear that talking about race and racism is not about making any children feel bad about their own family history. Conversation about race and racism is about giving students the opportunity to learn the truth about the torrid history of our country. Educators having these conversations should be scaffolding and helping students to think critically about this history. Regardless of how anyone feels about American history, the reality is that countless indigenous people were murdered in the conquest of the Americas and countless Africans were taken from their homes and became part of the slavery that, quite literally, built this country. Even after reservations were established and slavery was outlawed, people of color have never had an equal shot at the promises of the Declaration of

Independence, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is the reality of how our country was built, and denying that reality is teaching our children falsehoods.

**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?**

Many studies have shown that student engagement is the driving factor behind student discipline. Nonetheless, when students misbehave, Black and brown students are more likely to receive more harsh disciplinary action. The restorative justice programs within DPS are improving, but are not yet enough. One major problem is that they are inconsistently applied throughout the district, meaning that a student is criminalized or not through punitive discipline measures based purely on what school district they live in. Additionally, in many schools, “restorative justice centers” are essentially the same as the in school suspension they sought to replace, but with a different sign on the door. Neither of these are going to accomplish the goals of this practice. At the same time, I have seen these practices work to de-escalate students when implemented well. I think this is a matter of support and accountability in implementation. I also don’t think it’s reasonable to expect school level staff to be implementing this well when the messages from the administrators are focused on punishment, so I believe DPS must ensure that all administrators understand the steps of restorative practice and administration has presented clear guidelines on how it must be implemented across the district. We need to see the district and school level time and resources being spent on implementation.

One of the best parts of how restorative justice programs are being implemented within DPS is that they have buy-in from the community. So many people have been attentive to this work as it relates to the school to prison pipeline, seeing the support from all stakeholders, and the District Attorney’s office has been helpful in seeking public support and input on implementing these processes. We still need to do more work to hold administrators accountable for racial disparities in student discipline and encourage the district administration to provide more consistent support and accountability for using restorative practices. Some schools are doing an incredible job implementing restorative practices, but it remains unfair and implemented inconsistently across the district.

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

I believe the purpose of the Board of Education is to serve as leadership and accountability for the highest level district administrators. Of course, then, the Board of Education is held accountable by their constituents. My leadership style in my job and volunteer work with the People’s Alliance and PTA is one of collaboration. I want to hear from stakeholders before making a decision, but I am also not afraid to take an unpopular position if I believe it is what is best for children.

**6. What is your view of how the 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?**

The culture within DPS is, far too often, testing centered. There are several factors that have caused this. The first is former Boards of Education and County leaders making funding conditional on better test scores. Of course, the underfunding at the state level and moves to privatize our public schools have forced the Board of Education to push for higher test scores because enrollment and state takeovers are based on them. Nonetheless, test scores and the things that are tied to them can reflect the very same culture that has led educators and administrators to focus on high

accountability student discipline models that, ultimately, are not beneficial for anyone. Instead, I believe in an investment model, where smart investments yield positive results for everyone without punishment or threat of punishment (in this case, often through demotions or firing). An entire shift in district culture where shared leadership is more important than test scores will lead to an increased ability for students, parents, and staff to ask for the support they need.

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

Charter schools are merely a means to privatize public education and often only serve to segregate the public school population, and for that reason, are rarely actually beneficial to students. Nonetheless, there is a very real fear among parents about sending their children to public school, and while I don't share that fear, I do think something needs to be done to ensure that every public school, especially our neighborhood schools, are meeting the needs of every child. I look forward to working to do just that and making charter schools undesirable as alternatives to our incredible public 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?**

Yes. This is a major priority for me, and I intend to find the resources to make it happen. Support staff should be working with the ratios determined by their professional boards and organizations, not based on how much we want to allocate for them. For example, when the recommendation for school counselors is that they serve 250 students, to do anything other than meet that recommendation is to underserve our children. That's the goal. The question is where the money is going to come from. As a single mother, I know how to get creative with a budget, and I'm willing to do that as a member of the Board of Education. I have also been a staunch advocate for increasing county funding to meet our students' needs. Ultimately, however, I believe this funding should be coming from the state, and I have advocated for and will continue to advocate for our state leadership to fully fund North Carolina's schools.

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

- **community engagement**

Community engagement is a large part of Durham Public Schools Strategic plan, and I appreciate the efforts that they have made to improve their ability to meet families where they are. I do think there is still so much room to grow these efforts. I would like to see language services made available in every aspect, stakeholders calling central office, individual school offices, and even school relations should have access to language services every step of the way. The Board of Education has an opportunity to lead the way in those efforts by making their agendas, notes, and calls for public comment available in English and Spanish. We saw lots of people working hard over the pandemic to use grace in meeting families where they are, having outdoor conversations, meetings over zoom, etc. We need to see that extended into all hearings that will impact Durham Public Schools.

Community engagement for DPS could be more equitable in having public conversation opportunities in the very schools we are discussing, these buildings are more accessible than Cleveland St. For conversations on Capital Improvement lets have those conversations in the very schools our educators and students are working and learning in each day. If we have conversations

about all the issues in the spaces that they are relevant to, we will begin to uncover the inequitable spaces across the district and begin to address all those issues.

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

I will bring to the board the experience of a working-class, single mother, who is willing to listen to the lived experiences of all families. I will bring the experience of a parent that has overcome trauma to advocate at the hands of a public school system that was not prepared to be student affirming and centered.

I am uniquely skilled at finding creative solutions to problems, even when there seem to be no solutions available. One example of this is how I worked with the People's Alliance Education Action Team to advocate with the Board of Education and Board of County Commissioners to increase the minimum wage of school employees to \$15 per hour. Another example of how I problem solve is to question the status quo and the way things have always been done in order to create systems that serve our current stakeholders.

I am also skilled at advocating for youth and families and have done so in my advocacy for the Bull City Community Schools Partnership, my work as the Hope Valley PTA President, and as NCPTA Advocacy Chair. I am prepared to bring this advocacy to the board, along with my skills in problem solving and lived experience, to advocate for all Durham children and families.

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

Club Boulevard Magnet Elementary School and Hope Valley Elementary School.

**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?**

Step one is certainly to ensure that every decision we make moving forward keeps carbon neutrality and other environmental factors at the forefront. Solar panels on every new construction should be a given along with building plans that do minimal harm to the environments they're built in. This is the bare minimum we should expect of our elected leaders.

We're also going to have to have some hard conversations about how we are going to work towards improving our existing infrastructure. We must move to more efficient systems including redistricting to promote less miles being driven every day and focusing on improving neighborhood schools to increase attendance as close to home as possible. We must increase recycling and composting programs at our schools and educate students and families on the importance of these choices and continuing them outside of school.

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

Yes.

**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 was part of the fight to bring employees in house and guarantee a \$15 per hour minimum wage. That was a strong start, but even at the time, I knew it was insufficient. With record inflation and skyrocketing housing costs, I have already begun advocating for a \$17 minimum wage, knowing that this also is insufficient. The reality is that our classified staff deserve to be paid a living wage and by the time we get this minimum wage passed, our data on what a living wage is in Durham will already be out of date. If elected, I hope to work with fellow Board members to cast a vision for what a living wage will be and work towards making that a reality before our classified staff are struggling.

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

I will continue going back to our need to be family and student centered, as early as possible we need to partner with community agencies to make sure students see the importance of diverse career opportunities. Students need to be affirmed in their choices to select technical and career choices. This will need more buy-in from community stakeholders and further conversations with everyone connected to education in Durham, given that Durham has a wealth of universities it can seem like that is the only choice toward success, but that is not the reality of Durham. Durham needs our students to be willing to do more technical and career development.

**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?**

Yes, I would like to see increased interest in this program and more marketing around the BETC. This could mean more attention to the leadership structure of the program, perhaps the BOCC or the Durham Public Schools Foundation can take up leading the governance of this program so that more stakeholders have access to these resources.

I would work to expand professional development opportunities to help educators identify how this learning model can be used on their school levels.

I'd like to see more schools bringing in the opportunity for the work of BETC to be presented and used in their building, monthly, weekly, or as often as possible. Students deserve to see the work of BETC and how it benefits our entire community and the importance of the program.

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

I have worked for Duke University's bookstore since 2008 which has given me experience managing a staff, managing a million dollar budget, and balancing the needs of student customer demands. I have also volunteered with PTA, both locally and at the state level; have served on the Board of Rebound, Alternatives for Youth; and have worked with the People's Alliance in a variety of capacities. I have attached my resume to describe these in more detail.

**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?**

As of right now, I have not accepted any corporate donations. I am not necessarily opposed to doing so on the condition that this money would not have any strings attached. The Durham Regional Association of REALTORS® have reached out to me and because of the conflict of their vested interests and what I believe to be best for students and families, I have chosen to not accept a donation from them. This is out of an abundance of caution and without judgment to other candidates who choose to do so.

As a general rule, I am comfortable in my ethical commitment to center children in every decision I make, and if a company whose practices and policies I do not support wants to give money to that cause, I am happy to use that money to make Durham a better place for every family. For example, I cannot support the way Amazon treats its employees, but I will support organizations that take charitable donations from Amazon.

Throughout this campaign, I have sought to live out my values. My t-shirts were made by a local Black-owned business. My yard signs were made by union workers. My campaign staff was all willing to work on a volunteer basis, but paying fair wages is important, and I have committed to doing that.

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

President Biden and Cal Cunningham. I am a registered Democrat, and while many of the party's values are not as progressive as my own, I recognize power in a collective and am proud to be "blue".