

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 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?

For the upcoming year, the Board of Education has to continue to navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our students, our educators and our finances. My three priorities are:

- **Affirm** our students and educators. *The pandemic continues to take a toll on the mental and social-emotional health of our students. In the upcoming year, I will continue to advocate to enrich our curriculum with culturally responsive text and cultivating culturally affirming school culture. I will affirm our educators by working to increase salaries, examine teacher working conditions and create opportunities for growth. We need to keep the phenomenal educators we have in Durham Public Schools working with our students.*
- **Educate** our students through acceleration learning practice. *The interruption in schooling from the pandemic has created some learning opportunities that our educators must continue to meet. We must continue to focus on students gaining academic skills and providing interventions early. We should connect students with career and technical pathways that will provide exposure for career opportunities and connect with the booming economy here in Durham.*

- *Creating a **liberating** school system that has policies, practices and procedures that remove barriers for student success. Last year, we passed the Racial & Educational Equity policy with pillars that outline how our school system should operate and hold ourselves accountable for racial equity. Over the course of the next year, we need to develop the procedures and practices to implement the policy with fidelity. We also have huge school construction projects in the coming years. A focus on creating modern and engaging learning spaces should guide our work in the next four years.*
- 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?**
- During my tenure on the Board of Education, I championed DPS writing our own equity policy. A task force was convened which I was grateful to serve on, and the policy was adopted on June 10, 2021. DPS' [Racial & Educational Equity policy](#) helps to create a clear outline for how we want to achieve equity in our school district. One of the pillars of the policy is to ensure access and representation in academic programming in schools. In the past, I will continue to advocate for disaggregating data to understand who is recommended for AIG and honors/Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes. I will review and request changes to our policies to ensure that access to these courses is based on a portfolio of work from students and not a test grade. We also need to ensure parents are aware of their rights to advocate for their children to be in different courses. Lastly, we need to continue to train all educators in anti-racist and bias trainings. With the addition of our Office of Equity Affairs, all DPS employees have attended Equity 101 and schools have equity champions within their buildings. We want to continue to expand our equity professional learning and daily practice to ensure our classes are representative of our student population.*
- 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?**
- We have to tell the truth about race, racism, the legacy of slavery and white supremacy in our country. While on the Board, I voted to adopt [A Resolution Against White Supremacy](#) and the [Resolution Opposing House Bill 324 \(WRAL News Story\)](#). I do not support removing this history from the classroom as it's an integral part of our history. I believe we teach this history by providing primary and secondary sources, incorporating multiple perspectives and asking critical thinking questions.*
- 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?**

*Restorative practices is a practice rooted in indigenous cultures that is a way to strengthen connections between people and community. The implementation of Restorative Practices as a new way of building culture and repairing harm is a positive change for DPS. This approach builds empathy amongst students, allows for students to hear different perspectives and promotes a new approach to conflict resolution. We can continue to improve the fidelity of the program in our schools. In some schools, students have reported that the Restorative Practice feels more like In School Suspension with a new coat of paint - that's not okay. We need to deepen Restorative Practice Coordinators understanding of the approach and provide ongoing coaching and professional development. Secondly, we need to continue to promote restorative practices as both a **proactive** and reactive measure. If students do not feel a part of a school community, once a harm is committed, the desire to repair that harm and rejoin the community will be low. Culture building practices like proactive circles must accompany the reactive portion of this approach.*

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

The Board of Education is a governance body that oversees the Superintendent, the district's budget, engages with the community, advocates on local, state and federal level and serves as an ambassador of the school system. The BOE must be able to balance listening to different perspectives, seeking viewpoints different than our own and keep our focus on what's best for students. The Board should be honest, transparent, respectful and collaborative. As the Chair of the Board, I lead with a focus on what's best for students.

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?

DPS Central Office staff should serve as a support system for our schools. They provide not only the operational support (finances, maintenance, child nutrition support) but the necessary coaching for improvement. Central Office staff should operate with a student first focus considering how their work will ultimately impact student success. To be responsive to students, parents and staff, the Central Office should adopt a listening first perspective and seek to find resolutions in times of challenges. I encourage the Superintendent to ensure his staff leads with a focus on students, equity-center mindset, listening deeply to students, parents and staff and to think creatively about how to support students.

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

Charter schools are an option for families in Durham. As a School Board, we do not have the authority to have any governance over charter schools. DPS is required to provide a percentage of any new funding from the County to charter schools. Charter

schools have played a role in decreasing student enrollment as families look for other options. I believe DPS must continue to create an experience in our schools that will make DPS the best option for families. This means continued marketing the great educational opportunities in our system and building relationships with the community. School Board members should serve as ambassadors for DPS.

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

I have voted for DPS budgets that included adding additional school counselors, nurses and social workers in our buildings. I continue to support the goal of working towards a 250:1 student counselor ratio which is best practice according to the [American School Counselor Association](#). I voted in support of using DPS' COVID-19 federal relief funding to add 10 mental health counselors to our schools for 2022 through 2024. Since these positions are funded using ESSR/ARPA funding, I have already begun to ask the question, how can we sustain this support after 2024? How can we leverage co-located mental health, community-based mental health organizations and state-wide work to provide the necessary support for our students. I also want to increase our partnerships with support staff of color. We want students to see folks who look like them in these roles. We will need to think creatively about the recruitment and retention of these support staff positions as there are nationwide shortages in these areas.

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

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

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe we learned a lot about how to better communicate and support our families through conducting more equitable community engagement. Our school district needed to communicate often and quickly, about huge shifts that had a major impact in the lives of our families. We implemented two-way communication which allowed for robust engagement on decisions regarding returning to in-person learning. DPS heard a preference from 90% (29,382) of our families. During the initial school closure period, DPS pivoted quickly to provide healthy meals for students and to create opportunities to ensure that our classified staff could continue to be paid. Through partnerships with local community partners, DPS provided learning centers so students could engage in learning while essential workers went to work. DPS purchased Chromebook devices and hotspots to ensure all students can have access to virtual learning. Our Family Academy program collaborated with the IT department and the Multilingual Resource Center to conduct Facebook Live videos to show how to utilize the many different virtual learning platforms. DPS invested in air filtrations and upgrading HVAC systems to improve the school learning environment. DPS has continued to partner with the

Public Health Department and local community organizations to host vaccine clinics to increase access to the vaccines. I believe that each decision regarding how to respond and continue to protect our students through the pandemic has been approved using an equity lens.

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

I am an experienced and collaborative leader. I have six years of School Board experience in Durham and served as the Vice Chair from 2018-2020 and Chair from 2020 to currently. My experience as the Chair leading during the COVID-19 pandemic, has prepared me to continue doing great work for our students. I have approached my Board work as a collaborative experience. I encouraged the BOE to develop relationships with County Commissioners to discuss our last budget ask which led to an \$8.5 million increase in local funding. I have worked with our Durham delegation to the NC House & Senate and US House Representative David Price's office to advocate on behalf of our students. DPS has important work ahead with a bond on the ballot this fall, building of new schools and continued focus on increasing academic achievement. My professional work at Student U and The Equity Collaborative shaped my equity-centered mindset, deep focus on students' needs and developing relationships across differences. I believe my experience and collaborative approach will ensure our students have what they need.

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

I do not have children, but if I did, they would attend DPS! They would attend Southwest Elementary, Lowes Grove Middle School & Hillside High 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?

DPS has created an updated 10 year Capital Improvement Plan that includes building of new schools and major renovations to many of our aging buildings. This past year, I along with the Board, approved the hire of a Director of Construction & Sustainability. This new hire has hit the ground running creating a theory of action, Learning Environment Guidelines (LEG) and developing new partnerships to increase our sustainability efforts. We are piloting a program with Don't Waste Durham to reduce the amount of garbage produced from school lunches. The Board approved a contract with SiteLogIQ, to help develop an energy conservation program that has created savings for the district and reduced our energy outputs. SiteLogIQ did an audit of our current practices and developed a plan to decrease energy usage including an energy management dashboard and a process for "shutting down" a building to conserve energy. DPS will also involve students at Southern School for Energy & Sustainability, to create learning opportunities for students. For new construction and renovation projects, the LEG will help ensure that schools are becoming more green. This week, DPS will receive an update on a partnership with

Durham County and the City of Durham to participate in Duke Energy's Green Source Advantage program. We will continue to evaluate how we can move towards carbon neutrality. Schools must do our part to slow the negative impacts of climate change.

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

With the hire of a Director of Construction & Sustainability, there is a renewed focus on ensuring our facilities are saving energy and considering how we can move towards a greener school system. I love the idea of having Durham residents trained and hired to develop infrastructure for renewable energy on all DPS properties. I would strongly advocate for DPS students to have internship opportunities within this project. I will need to learn more about the bond before giving my full support.

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?

North Carolina's minimum wage is \$7.25/hr and \$7.25/hr is not enough for anyone to sustain themselves in Durham. I believe that NC's minimum wage should at least be \$15/hr. I supported the increase to \$15/hr for all DPS staff members and collaborated with our County Commissioners to make sure it became a reality for our educators.

After voting to raise bus driver salaries earlier this school year, I advocated for a salary study for a comprehensive review of job descriptions, duties and salary. We need to look systematically across different roles in our district and compare local and national data to make recommendations for new salary scales. While this study will take some time, it will create a systematic approach to increasing salaries. The child nutrition workers, Community Education staff, custodial staff, instructional assistants and many others in classified positions will be positively impacted by this work. Currently, [MIT's Living Wage Calculator](#) states for 1 adult with no children, the living wage is \$15.22/hr. While DPS is currently starting at \$15.76/hr, from my own personal experience, this number still feels too low as a living wage during this time in Durham. I look forward to the salary study to illuminate disparities and create new salary schedules based on the current economic reality.

I support our Superintendent's proposed budget that advocates for an increase in DPS' teacher supplement from \$5,675 to \$6,500. I voted in support of bonuses for educators (all people employed by DPS full-time) of \$1000 (after taxes) last fall, another \$1,500 this spring and \$1,500 in October 2022. I value the work of all DPS educators and as a Board member, I will continue to advocate for wages and other opportunities that make DPS a great place to work.

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

Career & Technical Education (CTE) is a vital part of the vision to ignite the limitless potential of our students. CTE programs help students connect their learning with their future lives. When students feel what they are learning in school will support their future, they are more engaged and can find meaning in school. While serving on the Board, I supported DPS' launched the 3-2-1 Initiative seeking to provide high school students with 3 career awareness activities, 2 career exposures and 1 internship experience before leaving high school. This creates more opportunities for students to have an understanding of possible career options. DPS students have served as interns during spring break and during the summer in a variety of career placements. DPS is also partnering with Durham Tech to bring additional classes to high school students in DPS buildings. The partnership with Durham Tech and our CTE programs allow students to leave DPS with credentials that can lead to career employment after high school graduation.

I want to see us continue to expand CTE exposure and awareness opportunities into our elementary and middle school programs. This can help strengthen our CTE pathways and provide students with the skills needed to access many of the new jobs coming to the Durham area, many of which do not require a college degree.

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?

The Bionomic Educational Training Center is an excellent example of partnerships that lead to increased educational and professional experiences for our students & educators. I hope that we can continue to grow this program to include more students, educators and schools.

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

From 2010-2019, I worked at Student U, a community organization that believes in using the power of education, advocacy and leadership to build a more just and equitable Durham. I served as the Chief Program Officer overseeing programming for rising 6th through college seniors who were majority Black or Latinx and whose families qualified for free and reduced lunch. Under my leadership, 100% of students graduated from high school. At Student U, I learned more about the Durham community working alongside students and their families on their journey navigating our public school system. I currently work as an Equity Leadership Coach supporting school districts as they work towards equity. I serve on the Advisory Board for the Public School Forum of NC which allows me to learn and shape policy issues for public schools in North Carolina. Both work experiences continue to root my perspectives in student and family experience as well as expand my policy lens.

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?

I have not taken any donations from corporations. While I am greatly appreciative of the donor support I have received, I do not believe that support should dictate my policy positions. I must decide what is in the best interest of students.

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

I voted for President Joe Biden and Cal Cunningham for US Senate.