



Washington Teachers' Union

Fighting for the schools DC's community deserves

1239 Pennsylvania Ave SE • Washington, DC 20003 • 202.517.1477 • www.wtulocal6.net

Dear Candidate,

We invite you to complete the following questionnaire of the Washington Teachers' Union's Committee on Political Education (COPE). This will be used as the first step of our endorsement process which includes a candidate forum, recommendations by our COPE, and vote by our Representative and/or Membership Assembly for final approval.

This questionnaire is part of an expedited process that was approved by our WTU Representative Assembly for the DC Democratic Primary Ward 1 Council and Mayoral races exclusively. We will be engaging in our regularly timed endorsement process for all other races, likely in late January/early February.

Key Dates:

- **Questionnaire:** Send the completed questionnaire by close of business January 2nd, 2026 to lfuchs@wtulocal6.net
- **Forum:** Save the Date for our Candidate Forum for Mayor and Ward 1 DC Council which will be held either in person or virtually (dependent on approval of the Building Use Agreement with DCPS) on **Wednesday, January 7th at 6PM-8PM at Cardozo HS Auditorium**
- **WTU Representative Assembly:** Tuesday, January 13th at 4:30 PM for WTU Members only to vote on endorsement recommendations.

In solidarity,

Laura Fuchs

President, Washington Teachers' Union

Candidate Information:

Name: Robert Leon Gross Position Sought: Mayor

Address: 601 Edgewood St N.E.

Email: Robert@grossformayor.com

Phone: (202) 995-6265

Are you using the public financing option? (**bold and underline** one) **Yes** / No

Notice:

1. The best way to complete this questionnaire:

- a. Fill it out in Microsoft Word/Google Docs
 - b. Bold and underline any yes or no questions
 - c. Type your responses into the boxes below the question (the space will expand as you proceed)
 - i. Please limit all responses to around 1000 characters
 - ii. Do not use AI or other forms of Chat GPT
 - d. Save it as a PDF with your name in the title.
2. Your questionnaire, in its entirety, will be published on the WTU website and the WTU reserves the right to use responses to any answer, in their entirety, in our campaign materials.
 3. Any statement made in this questionnaire that is later contradicted through action or association with “education reform” groups or groups that seek to privatize education such as ElectEd, Strong Schools Now, EdReform Now, and DC Charter School Alliance, will cause the WTU to revisit any endorsement offered and may result in the rescinding of our endorsement.

In your own words...

1. How have you interacted with public schools? Please include any experiences you have advocating for DC public schools, parents or students.

I was born at Howard University, lived on 14th and R and went to Garrison Elementary, lived with my aunt for a few years before returning for 8 grade then being skipped forward directly into 9th where I went to Cardozo Education Campus (formerly known as Senior High). I would say that I actually quite loved my schools, the curriculums, the afterschool activities, from Music class to Youth & Government it was something I found myself longing to return to.

I’ve seen multiple closures that have had some of my closest friends in shambles, experiences that shaped their lives, gone. I’ve had a considerably better time within DCPS than a lot of my peers could have hoped for and I will continue to be an advocate for them. In my adult life, after the military I went into IT for the government, where I stayed and watched my sister and her 3 children integrate into DCPS. This was for myself a moment that I realized the role of being an uncle, member of my community and role model was as important as it should be, a lesson I still remind myself about today.

I am hoping to bring the level of inquisitiveness that I had as a child into the lives of all of those who are going through the same interactions. They need to be able to feel as though their lives matter outside of their school district.

2. What is the top priority facing public education in the District of Columbia, and how will you address it if you are elected?

My top priority with public education in the District of Columbia is that it lacks the ability to see each student individually. They are often unable to feel in sync or on par with their peers due to having obstacles unseen through the eyes of the DCPS staff. Through increased guidance via the school and community engagement, we can start to target all of the unseen fractures in our youth’s mental health and create further advancement of our future’s future.

Keeping our schools staffed, retained, and stable (via funding and equality across all wards for both students and educators) are but a few ways we can truly match my goal. Through the aforementioned community engagement; through parental involvement and teacher transparency,

we can measure metrics (via decreased truancy, dropout rates, and retention rates) that map out how our kids are doing in real time in regard to their mental, emotional, and physical health, as well as chart the changes that the staff are going through and what areas of their well-being can be improved.

3. How have you worked with WTU in the past? How will you improve that in the future?

I haven't worked with the WTU before, but I can tell you how you've worked for the betterment of my life and opportunity: You fought for many of my teachers to be able to afford to live in the city that they taught, for my school life to have teachers who could get up every day and love the career they chose showed itself in the commitment they showed me and the other students like me. You endured the shift from the No Child Left Behind era to this new post-Covid era, and you haven't stopped. I hope to be able to recognize the labor that goes into every aspect. I believe, coupled with the ability to figure out the differences in situations of each individual teacher and staff member, we will be able to grow the relationship between ourselves.

Funding Public Schools

4. Do you believe the current process for how schools funding decisions are made is working adequately?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address the Student-Based versus Comprehensive Staffing funding models as well as the role of the Local School Advisory Team (LSAT).
- If you believe it is not adequate, what would you do differently if elected?

No, I don't.

I think there are plenty of areas that the current administration has been lacking on that could be resolved with the active involvement of the LSAT as more than its current state. I believe with more guidelines and ward-wide involvement campaigns, they can be used to shape a map of the problem areas that form the gap between parents and students, or more widely the gap between parents and teachers.

With the assistance of Comprehensive Staffing, we can potentially get ahead of common issues such as burnout and absenteeism; instead of an advisory budgetary board, I propose that the LSATs be authorized to receive a different type of data set geared around the mentioned common issues, but as well: counselor referrals (ISS, OSS, Guidance), teacher workloads, and family engagement. If the funding for a Ward 4 school is disproportionate to the funding for a Ward 7 school, then our system is failing. I intend to resolve this.

5. Do you believe DCPS is adequately following DC Council laws, directives, and transparency requirements when it comes to the funding of our public schools?

Yes / No

What is your philosophy around how schools should be funded to ensure funding equity across all 8 wards and ensure DCPS follows the laws?

My philosophy is that we have to understand that there are multiple school-level down to student-level failures that are being unnoticed. DCPS routinely submits late reports to the council if they submit them at all (within the school year). Coupled with the lack of council oversight to the matter, DCPS hasn't had the proper guidance.

The staff, the teachers, the administration, and most importantly the students are at risk due to their inability to be transparent. Our budgets must reflect the individual families' household incomes, language needs, disability service and housing conditions. Where the need for support is higher that support must be stronger. We have to be in sync with the child's home life as much as their school life to get the full picture of how much funding would be equal.

The golden rule being: Equality does not equal uniformity. We need to individualize our care and support and have budgets that show that as well.

If elected, what will your role be and how will you ensure that all students, especially those with special needs and English Language Learners, are receiving the services they need to succeed academically and socially in school?

As Mayor, I recognize an issue that will take a generation to resolve itself. The mind of man is evolving day by day, but our institutions that we expect to match the mental growth are becoming stagnant. As the buildings themselves become more elaborate and beautifully designed, we face chronic shortages of special education, Speech, OT, and behavioral support teachers. Understaffing is a culture issue within DCPS; if people don't feel as though the schools are listening to their teachers, then there won't be any motivation to jump into the field. Real-time staffing gaps need to be properly reported and measured so that the schools, parents, and the community can know what is needed for their children to properly thrive.

The need for proactive, functionally sufficient, kinetic funding models is higher than ever; the resources must account for real lived conditions. Schools should be able to predict outcomes (not brace for impact). Equity expectations aren't set to micromanage but to enforcing compliance when schools are underfunded relative to need.

6. Do you believe that DCPS has struck a good balance between spending on our schools versus spending on and through central office?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please include your thoughts on the role of DCPS central office including but not limited to its role in funding a DCPS technology plan and unfunded mandates.
- If you answered no, what would you do differently if elected?

I believe that with what you have to work with, the symbiotic nature of central office and DCPS's school spending is adequate. The issue persists with mid-year mobility and schools having their funding locked at the beginning of the year. Shifts roll out, yet their support can be delayed or even only partial support given. I believe all that is needed is for Central Office's accountability to be checked to a greater degree. My administration believes that we should not be pouring onto your workload far more than necessary.

Central office needs to be faster on our alignment to get ahead of and document the spikes, as well as the bumps, that happen to our schools and deliver the needed resources—be that through temp staffing, funds for various programs, or mid-year allocations.

7. Do you believe that DCPS is adequately supported to deal with the high rates of mid-year student mobility (where students enroll throughout the school year)?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- If you answered no, how would you suggest changing the funding structure to better support DCPS schools?

No, I do not; the challenges teachers are going through is an ever-present and in a constant flux of support. Central office is not meant to micromanage your daily lives; they have new requirements and it's sent out and expected to be implemented immediately, when in reality every school needs time for the adjustment, especially assuming that this new requirement is on top of previously requested notices. With mid-year mobility due to housing instability, home life shifts, or waves from the charters and transplants (parents from outside the city moving in), teachers cover the gaps without much support. Even when technology has been introduced, it doesn't give the assistance that it should to staff, still causing data dumps and increased screen time.

I propose a more centralized central office, one that would handle the mid-year response through responding to the need for rapid staffing adjustments and funding availability. Under my administration, Central Office will track metrics such as class size, Admin load (preventive measure against burnout), and teacher retention. This way, Central Office has faster support when students arrive mid-year just as much as when staff's needs change overnight.

District Educators

8. Do you believe that DCPS has a problem with high teacher turnover?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- If you answered yes, what would you promote and do to reduce teacher turnover?
- If you answered no, what do you believe is keeping turnover at acceptable levels?

For my administration, education & opportunity will be one of my highest KPIs. The students can't be expected to retain their knowledge if we aren't able to retain our teachers and staff. Being understaffed destabilizes schools, causes teachers' workloads to skyrocket, and erodes the foundation of trust that is built from teacher to parent, as from parent to child. The key that many others may be missing as well isn't that our schools just need more staff; it's that the staff whom try and are unable to stay are often plagued by issues of livelihood: housing cost, transportation, and safety.

My administration proposes early-, mid-, and late-term career alignment programs, so teachers between 1 and 10 years can feel as though they are being heard and guided through the challenges that may occur from their tenure, which can effectively reduce the turnover rate relatively quickly, with markers in place to monitor for drops in metrics.

9. Do you believe that DCPS has negotiated in good faith and secured strong contracts with WTU on the last four contracts under Mayoral Control?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- If you answered no, what would you do differently to ensure that they are stronger and negotiated in good faith moving forward?

I do not believe that DCPS isn't acting within good faith. Negotiations ended in 2023 with STEP increases, staffing provisions, and pay adjustments. The real trial comes from better class sizes, automatic monitoring to proc staffing or funding adjustments, and system-wide administrative burden. These challenges exist beyond the boardroom and require real progress, both on and off, to see changes that will affect our teachers' daily lives in a positive aspect.

10. Do you believe that the WTU should be able to negotiate our evaluation system and will you agree to do everything in your power to repeal DC Code 1-617.18 so that we can?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

I'm perfectly fine negotiating IMPACT's role on the WTU. I don't see an issue with you learning and having input in the way you are graded; when being the person working, you know what's a fair grading scale and what's not (for yourself).

Through the HLS, these metrics would be realigned, if not fully adjusted, regardless. With class-size stability indexes, student support ratios (counselors, nurses, etc. to student), and keeping track of the non-instructional time being taken due to compliance with central office's requirements, we should be able to come together with a new revaluation that is progressable

with both parties.

11. Do you believe that DCPS has an adequate teacher pipeline?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address the following:
 - paraprofessional to teacher pipelines,
 - international educator work visas,
 - and teacher mentorship programs (or lack thereof).
- If you answered no, what do you believe should be different and how would you help the WTU win those changes?

Unfortunately, with the amount of understaffing and decreased retention rates, I'll say it's not the greatest "pipeline" from start to finish. Pipelines are meant for teachers to know that once they start, they'll have a straight shot to success; though they are hired as educators, the individual themselves may need to learn their placement and grow into their position; that's impossible if they are immediately meet with large classes, high workload, or even visa instabilities.

Through the HLS, the metrics that currently classify what DCPS's "pipelines" measure will be shifted to a more individual, stable focus. One that works to move teachers into the long haul, via tracking retention rates (1-5 years, 5-10, 10-20), along with more in-depth mentorship programs that don't only teach an educator how to operate in their school or ward, but in the city as a whole.

A teacher in Ward 6 should be able to move and go teach in a call in Ward 4 and not skip a beat. We need a system where educators can build their lives, careers, and future no matter where they are or where they move to within our city.

12. DCPS has possibly over 300 educators working on an H1B visa and would likely be forced to leave the country upon their expiration after a maximum of 6 years. Do you support DCPS continuing a program to provide an opportunity for H1B Visa Holders to get an employer sponsored Green Card through DCPS?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- If you answered yes, how will you help the WTU win back this program?

The fact that this program has been neglected is more of an issue than the fact that it will be brought back. Three hundred individuals that teach thousands of our children daily deserve to be a part of a system that appreciates their work here and understands how difficult it can be to juggle visa instability via the federal government, let alone our local one. The fact is that despite the council approving funds, the program has halted. My administration will continue talks and

eventually work to recreate a program that can be re-established and improved upon.

Working and Learning Conditions

13. Do you believe that DCPS is fully enforcing the WTU Collective Bargaining Agreement?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address issues that you believe are most important to ensure are enforced in the WTU CBA such as planning time, class sizes and school culture and climate.
- If you answered no, what will you propose and do to ensure that this is improved for our educators in all 8 wards of DC?

Currently, the CBA defines the metrics of class sizes, planning times, staffing, and working conditions noble when done correctly, but central office’s gaps are glaring, showing clear issues that are reflected from delayed staffing, funding lag, and teacher workload imbalance.

Inconsistency is the shadow of poor planning. With greater impact from our communities, schools, and teachers, we can lighten the burden on educators. Within my administration, the HLS would have a new subset of metrics to measure to ensure compliance, be it time-to-correction initiatives (faster resolution times), violation rates (when violations happen, how often, in what: class size, planning times, etc.), or public-facing compliance dashboards, so problems are visible early and can be targeted equally as efficiently.

14. Do you believe that our schools are being adequately *and equitably* modernized and maintained?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address DGS role in this process and your role in ensuring they are doing their job in a high quality, timely and transparent manner.
- If you answered no, what will you propose and do to ensure that this is improved for school communities in all 8 wards of DC?

The Department of General Services has done a fantastic job with the multiple infrastructure jobs around the city, crafting schools one can only marvel at. 10 years ago, when many of the schools were given disparaging names (“Dirty Doza”), the thought that they would look like the structures that they are today is mind-blowing. Modern buildings, system upgrades, and overall safer facilities has been an obvious Key Performance Indicator.

DGS’s commitment to ensuring that each facility is up to standards is equally important as the educators themselves; a classroom that is too hot or cold to pay attention is a distraction regardless. Through the HLS, we can document instructional delays due to facilities issues, measure time-to-repair, and ensure the minimization of instructional disruption. If we prepare our budgets for preventive measures while tying executive evaluations to equal-footing accountability metrics for both DGS and DCPS, we can bring a correcting balance to our

educators, parents, and students day to day.

15. Do you believe that all students are able to safely and quickly get to school?

Yes / **No**

Explain your rationale.

- Please address:
 - OSSE DOT,
 - Safe Passage,
 - increased Federal Presence,
 - and public transportation options.
- If you answered no, what will you propose and do to ensure that this is improved for school communities in all 8 wards of DC and for our immigrant students in particular?

The challenges to get to and from school in DC are unique; the Metro bus and rail are the two major forms of transportation as a Washingtonian, let alone as a child who may or may not even know what the point of tapping your card even does. The need for our children to feel safe at public transportation stops because of the community around them or the MPD doesn't need further explanation, other than to express the need for open communication between the two that eliminates the friction that is present in many communities anyway.

We will coordinate between the various agencies DDOT, MPD, OSSE, WMATA and recognize the shift in school schedules coupled with mid-year shifts in class sizes as to better prepare our transportation agencies around the seemingly sudden spikes in youth presence. Along with the HLS and its commitment to Civic Access and Efficiency, we will ensure that committee windows, student reported incidents, and transit reliability are on par with the commitment that we share with our students that they will receive the best of ourselves.

16. Do you believe that DCPS has adequate access to school nurses in all our schools?

Yes / **No**

Explain your rationale.

- If you answered no, what will you propose and do to ensure that this is improved for school communities in all 8 wards of DC?

I believe there are multiple issues that our schools are facing around health and wellness as a whole. Many of our schools rely on shared nurses rotating from facility to facility; health needs are real-time kinetic forces that static staffing without proper investment can't possibly function.

The need for a more defined intertwining relationship between school and nurse is never more prevalent. Nurse-to-student ratios based on class sizes for the year, coupled with mid-year assistance, are doable. Response times and coverage gaps are solvable; via central office's own accountability over rapid-response coverage pools for the mid-year shifts, we can resolve 90% of the issues faced by nurses in all sectors of DCPS's healthcare a focal point within my campaign's

Human Wellbeing policy.

Governance

17. Do you believe DC’s current system of Mayoral Control of DCPS is adequately and equitably serving all our students?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address the governance of OSSE and the oversight and selection of the Chancellor of DCPS.
- If you answered no, what will you propose and how will you advocate to change it?

The mayor appoints the chancellor, who then works alongside the council and the Office of State Superintendent of Education; together, we are supposed to be creating faster systemwide responses to issues, coordinate between our agencies, and provide consistent and stable leadership. The process is not flawed; it has been neglected by every party involved.

The problem is not control of the moving parts; it's lack of grease, a lack of feedback, and course correction. High-mobility schools are hit some of the hardest because of Central Office lacking in their response to staffing delays and funding lags.

My HLS is not merely a standard of living in the sense that people get a food pantry and guaranteed housing; it’s a structure to hold our local government accountable for how they manage our city, not just the outcomes of decisions, but the correction of systemic conditions that have allowed for these issues to persist.

Readiness metrics that tie to retention, vacancy, and timeliness, coupled with ward-level information campaigns centralized on an engaging dashboard, all designed to intervene earlier when schools’ stress signals rise, is a necessity that we have to acknowledge.

18. Do you believe that the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) is adequately overseeing and ensuring transparency for DC Public Charter Schools?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address the appointment of PCSB members and the parity between what DCPS and DC Public Charter Schools have to report, including FOIA, and the policies they have to follow.
- If you answered no, what will you propose and how will you fight to change it?

DCPS and DCPCS are serving the same students of our city, just with different directives. Their reporting standards are different; how they measure staffing, class sizes, it’s all unique to their situations. That being said, the delays or partial responses that may be given by schools create opacity, not accountability; some of the information that FOIA covers can easily be turned into a

dashboard and publicly displayed for public review, turning it effectively into its own performance metric that DC didn't have to be sued to show.

The HLS ensures that the performance of charter schools is not left behind or too far exceeding that of DCPS through curriculum indexes (mid-year changes, etc.), real-time readiness scores (completed training, teacher support, etc.), and equity distribution (ward-to-ward variance of resource need). The charter board's appointments will equally be based on new metrics related to timeliness, accountability, and performance decisions, with set performance expectations and publicly published metrics that then tie them to evaluations, only enforcing consequences when metrics are missed.

19. Do you believe that DC has an adequate plan for public education that ensures a strong neighborhood public school system for all eight wards?

Yes / **No**

Explain your rationale.

- Please address your thoughts and philosophy on what a "strong" school is, and decisions around opening and closing schools in both DCPS and DCPCS, including a moratorium on charter openings.
- Include a description of what the process would look like.

I think DCPS is already a strong system in any neighborhood; it's a pillar of the community without its conscious thought. Our institutions are ingrained into our daily lives; there are many of those who go to DCPS who quietly acknowledge their presence and are proud of that notion.

The challenges come with understanding and finding balance between the needs of the school, neighborhoods, and students. The parents of children are struggling to feel supported, let alone heard, by the school, and the neighbors in the area equally feel disconnected from an entrenched staple of potentially the ward itself. Through proper enrollment stability over time, teacher retention, class size volatility, access to counselors, nurses, and SPED staff, and family trust indicators (such as attendance, persistence, and well-being reviews), we can truly listen to what the community is saying, both verbally and informally.

20. Will you support an update to the 2007 PERRA and 2010 Local Hatch Act that allows individuals employed by DC Public Schools to run for partisan public offices (including DC Council, Mayor and Attorney General)?

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

Both of these bills require Council votes for them to be updated; the fact that your legal employment bars you from a seat that could truly and drastically change your city, let alone your school, is ridiculous. You're a productive member of society, and you should be able to run for an office to which you believe you can make a positive difference.

PERRA prevents your thoughts from being displayed on paper, of basically how to evaluate the average teacher, while Hatch is designed to prevent **you** from recognizing your potential and being the person directly in charge of resolving such **disparage**. I plan to support our educators and ensure that those that seek better for themselves and their city have a way to do so.