



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: Aparna Raj Position Sought: DC Council, Ward 1

Address: 2656 15th St NW, Apt 302, Washington DC, 20009

Email: info@aparnafordc.com

Phone: 484-319-7375

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.

Public schools are the foundation for safe and healthy communities for all. My public school education helped me get into college with financial aid at a time when my family was struggling, which then led me to my first job in DC. I owe my life in DC to the public schools that raised me, and I will fight to ensure that every child in DC has support both in and outside the classroom. I’ve volunteered with students in different capacities, including as a tutor for Northstar tutoring and as a volunteer with Bancroft Elementary’s Safe Streets program. In 2024, I supported WTU while the union fought for a strong contract. Last year, I joined Free DC’s efforts to restore the \$1 billion in federal cuts to DC’s budget (including cuts to schools) and joined rallies to advocate for a people-focused DC budget that funds early childhood and grade school education. Finally, as a tenant organizer, much of my organizing has overlapped indirectly with ensuring families have stability.

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 biggest priority would be democratizing the school system and moving from our current system of mayoral control over our schools to one where our elected State Board of Education has more decision making power. While increasing funding (and restructuring the funding formula) is another major priority, changing the governance structure of our education system is the most urgent issue. Teacher retention in DC is among the lowest in the country and educator voice isn’t sufficiently valued in our education system. Student enrollment is [decreasing in DCPS](#) and moving to charter schools and standardized testing score gaps have been widening across race under mayoral control. Educators, students, and parents know more about building thriving schools than out-of-touch “reformers,” and they should have a bigger say in education policy. A more democratic school governance system will allow for more educator voice and expertise, as well as public accountability across our school system.

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

As a community organizer in DC, I’ve worked in coalition with WTU. I volunteered to elect WTU-endorsed candidates like Councilmembers Janeese Lewis George in Ward 4 and Zachary

Parker in Ward 5. As a union member, I also joined WTU members and others for different actions like the 2025 May Day rally in the face of federal attacks on workers' rights. And in 2024, when DCPS moved negotiations before dawn, WTU asked community members to show up with them outside the Marion Barry Building before negotiations. I joined Bargaining Committee members to show solidarity at 4am.

Through the campaign, I've talked to some current and former WTU members in Ward 1 to hear about their priorities for the school system. I would love to continue to support WTU at any upcoming member actions or advocacy efforts and if I'm elected I hope to work very closely with WTU to ensure that our education system works for students, parents, and teachers.

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?

First, DC schools are underfunded: we only spend 2.2% of DC's gross state product on education, when the US-wide average is 3.4%. I will fight for more funding, paid for by raising taxes on capital gains and high-value homes. Second, I will fight for a more comprehensive funding formula, with more opportunities for LSATs in the determination of staffing and services. The current process is flawed and leaves significant service and equity gaps. The Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) is a combination of student based and comprehensive staffing models, with a large percentage of funding following individual students. Because funding is largely decided by that formula, LSATs and community stakeholders have limited flexibility in funding decisions. This has created unacceptable disparities in service and resource availability across schools, especially those with declining enrollments and particularly east of the river. Third, school funding should be based on multi-year, programmatic planning, especially because DCPS has not been able to properly predict enrollment.

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 every child in DC deserves a well-funded school regardless of their zip code—but today, our public schools do not have the resources they need to serve all of our students, especially those who already face barriers to learn.

I would fight to fully fund DC schools, including community schools, wrap-around supports, and ELL and after-school programs. I would also use my oversight power to ensure that DC complies with the Schools First law, which protects public school budgets from cuts. When lawmakers fail to comply with Schools First, they threaten the schools' stability and students' outcomes. DCPS should also be following laws regarding funding for "at-risk" and disabled students, but DCPS has regularly failed to do so, leaving Black, brown and disabled students without the resources they deserve.

I would work to ensure that UPSFF keeps up with the costs of providing high-quality education to all students and will engage with teachers to ensure that their expertise informs education policy in the District.

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?

Students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELLs) should have the services they need in order to thrive academically and socially. Today, we fall far short of that goal.

I will fight to ensure that the District's school funding formula is providing sufficient funding to schools to provide those services, including enough multilingual teachers and a long overdue expansion of wrap-around supports and school-based behavioral health. I support reforming Power Schools, because special educators are essentially working two jobs; because they are under-resourced, students aren't getting the services they need to succeed. As discussed below, DCPS must keep its promises to international educators, who fill key ELL and bilingual teaching spots. I will work to make sure DCPS has enough multilingual and special needs subs. And I will work to improve oversight over these programs to monitor implementation and measure outcomes so that these students are not left behind.

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?

The central office is supposed to create efficiencies by handling functions, like food service contracts and substitute teachers, that are best centralized. However, I am concerned that the central office is setting too much policy with limited input from schools and that central office spending is so high while so many schools still don't have social workers or permanent subs. Fundamentally, DCPS central office should serve schools, and not the other way around.

The technology plan and unfunded mandates are good examples. Funding technology through the

central office as a school support makes some sense, but has led to inequitable or arbitrary choices because it's so distant from school-based decision making. Unfunded mandates set up many schools for failure: only more affluent schools can fund things that aren't fully funded. If elected, I would try to rectify this by advocating for increased funding for true school supports, and for additional teacher voice in processes that direct school support funding.

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?

I support a more comprehensive funding formula and staffing model in part to address mid-year mobility. Under the UPSFF, when students move, funding follows them, which has created problems for schools and job insecurity for workers. Similarly, I support hiring support staff (or giving additional pay and duties to current staff) to provide rapid support services to both incoming and outgoing students, especially new arrivals. Further, I support creating and funding a central office team to support students' transitions between schools; because the program would be centrally funded, there would be staff available to help support schools and kids even as enrollments shift.

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?

Absolutely. 26% of DCPS educators left their school from SY 22-23 to 23-24. That's unacceptable. DC is failing to support educators and students alike. DC must:

- Respect the Contract: DCPS frequently breaks the law and flouts WTU's CBA. I'll use my oversight power to hold them accountable.
- Raise Pay and Benefits: DCPS teachers earn 19.5% less than similarly qualified workers. We need to raise pay (esp. for paraprofessionals), provide educators more scheduling flexibility and planning time, and invest in growth-oriented professional development.
- Prioritize Mental Health: I support permanently funding OSSE's Educator Wellness Grants and guaranteeing mental health days for educators.
- Respect Educators: I support strengthening teacher voice; making IMPACT a subject of bargaining; and reducing over testing.

I also believe educators should have more voice in education policy. I support an education committee on the Council and believe public testimony should take place after school hours.

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?

While WTU has done incredible work securing gains in the latest contract, most notably around expanded sick leave and prep time, DCPS must do more to meet educators' demands to improve our schools.

DCPS's behavior in negotiations, including delay tactics and notable absences from the bargaining table, do not indicate good faith bargaining. If elected, I'll use my bully pulpit to pressure DCPS to negotiate in good faith, including showing up for bargaining sessions, attending union rallies, and using the council's investigatory authority where appropriate. I would also support repealing DC's prohibition on public sector strikes and DC Code 1-617.17(h) (requiring compensation negotiations be kept confidential) so that educators have all the tools available to them to hold management accountable at the bargaining table.

I also believe a governance structure change, and clear designation of negotiating power within that structure, would improve the way negotiations are carried out between management and WTU.

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.

IMPACT has been a failure. It's unnecessarily punitive, has a documented disparate impact on teachers of color, hangs over all aspects of teachers' work, and [drives high turnover](#).

I unreservedly support repealing DC Code 1-617.18 and guaranteeing educators' right to bargain over this core term and condition of employment. Everyone deserves to bargain over how they are evaluated, how those evaluations are interpreted and applied, and contest unfair or punitive decisions made based on those criteria. Schools shouldn't be an exception, and I'll always support guaranteeing public-sector workers basic bargaining rights.

I also will support teachers in bargaining over IMPACT. Educators know more than so-called "reformers" and researchers about what works in the classroom and what their students need to

succeed. I support empowering teachers to share their expertise, rather than relying on arbitrary and inequitable testing systems.

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

Yes / No

Explain your rationale.

- Please address the following:
 - o paraprofessional to teacher pipelines,
 - o international educator work visas,
 - o 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?

DCPS lacks a strong teacher pipeline. The good news is that we have tools to improve it. First, we have to support paraprofessionals. I support raising paraprofessionals' pay and expanding access to OSSE's Apprenticeship in Teaching program. Second, DCPS must keep its promises to international educators, restore its Green Card policy, and stop dragging its feet on H1-B renewals. International educators are filling key vacancies, especially for ELL and bilingual positions, and we owe them a pathway to permanent residency. I also strongly support hiring workers on H1-B visas, rather than shortterm J-visas which are more prone to exploitation.

I also strongly support mentorship programs, especially for new teachers who have high rates or attrition due to a steep learning curve. This can be done as a central office school support, to limit stress on teachers already doing this work at the school level.

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?

DCPS is putting international educators at risk. In January 2025, DCPS abruptly cancelled its Green Card policy, pulling the rug out from teachers who were relying on the District for their path to citizenship. Worse still, DCPS is dragging its feet in renewing teachers' H1-B visas. Those delays could put teachers at serious risk of losing their visas, especially given the Trump Administration's unstable position on H-1B visas. This is unacceptable.

If elected, I will: support restoring the Green Card policy; push DCPS to process H-1B renewals expeditiously; and demand answers about why DCPS isn't using funding appropriated for immigration attorneys. International educators bring specialized skills and have filled key

bilingual openings in our schools; we owe it to them, and their students, to keep our commitments.

Finally, I believe that DCPS should hire educators via H-1B visas with a path to citizenship, rather than shorter-term J visas, which are more unstable and easier to exploit.

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?

My understanding is that DCPS is failing to comply with educators' hard-won new contract and, on top of that, purposely dragging out grievances. For example, DCPS is trying to pressure principals not to pay co-teacher coverage payments. If elected, I would work with WTU to monitor compliance of critical protections in the contract and demand answers when DCPS breaks the law.

Compliance is important to me because the CBA both protects educators as workers and protects our students' learning opportunities. DCPS must respect the CBA, including protections for planning time, limits on class sizes, transparency with educators and WTU, adequate instructional resources, and compensation and benefits. Respecting the CBA also means cooperating with the grievance process and working in good-faith to solve issues that arise.

The DCPS central office must do more to prevent violations before they occur, rather than dealing with them after a time-consuming grievance process. I would work with WTU to pressure DCPS to fix follow the laws. I also support giving educators the right to go on ULP strikes.

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?

DGS is failing to maintain quality school facilities. Schools across DC, particularly in Wards 7 and 8, are waiting for basic upgrades to systems, like functional HVAC systems. DGS frequently

[fails to complete high-priority work orders](#) within the mandatory 10 day time limit. I have personally heard from teachers about these unacceptable issues, which can undermine students' learning. That's why I support increasing school funding, paid for by raising taxes on the wealthy.

We also must stabilize school budgets during modernizations. When schools move into a temporary space, like with Tubman Elementary, some families move to other schools. That can lead to destabilizing funding cuts. Maintenance failures most harm students who are already marginalized. When elevators don't work, students with disabilities can't get to class. While school ceilings are leaking in Ward 8, new schools with modern amenities have opened in wealthier, white parts of the city. I will use my oversight power to hold DGS accountable and make sure that it follows the law.

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?

I regularly support ICE watch and have volunteered with the Bancroft Safe Streets team, so I know firsthand that it's dangerous to get to school.

Increased federal presence has led to a sharp increase in absenteeism, as parents are afraid of ICE's lawless arrests. Many students are only making it to school because educators and the community have gone to heroic efforts to provide safe transportation—without any support from DCPS. If elected, I will fight for legislation limiting the ICE threat in DC, including CM Lewis George's bill to stop local collaboration with ICE. I'll also use my constituent services team to support mutual aid efforts, with a special focus on access to education.

I support efforts to enhance traffic calming measures near schools and in areas with high levels of student traffic, as well as expanding Safe Passage programs. I am skeptical of OSSE DOT's efforts to shift responsibility for transportation for students with disabilities through the stipend program. I support requiring OSSE to fulfill these responsibilities, with additional funding as needed.

Finally, I will fight for fast, affordable transit for all, including by increasing bus frequency and expanding bus lanes.

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?

Fewer than 40% of the schools in the District have nurses on staff full time. That's a far cry from adequate access to nurses across all schools.

As Ward 1 Councilmember, I will support funding school nurses across the system, with particular focus on funding them in schools with high percentages of at-risk funding. Ideally, school nurses would be centrally funded as school supports rather than through the USPPF. That would ensure that nurses aren't cut when enrollments shift, which is a particularly serious problem east of the river, leading to inter-ward inequities in nurse availability.

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?

I agree with the growing coalition of parents, teachers, and unions that seek more democratic control of the DC education system. Mayoral control has failed to prioritize investment in our schools, and there is not good evidence around its effectiveness. As Councilmember, I would support legislation that removes the Office of the State Superintendent of Education from mayoral control, as well as to reform the Mayor's unilateral power to hire and fire the Chancellor. I support granting more authority (including OSSE oversight) to the elected State Board of Education, so that they have the authority to do the job that voters elected them to do.

These changes to our district's educational system would facilitate the involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in helping to shape a more democratic education system that is more responsive and effective.

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?

I strongly support increased oversight of charter schools, which are notorious for self-dealing, engage in [widespread disability discrimination](#), and have no documented track record of improving student outcomes.

In DC, the PCSB is not providing adequate oversight and transparency for DC Public Charter Schools. For example, some PCSB annual reports [do not even discuss all elements](#) that PCSB is required to monitor and report on. I support making charter schools subject to FOIA, to make sure that they are at least held to the same transparency and reporting requirements as DCPS. And I will only vote to confirm PCSB members who will provide rigorous oversight of student outcomes and equity in charter schools.

Finally, I believe that charter schools receiving public funding should be held to the same labor standards as DCPS. I support unionizing charter schools and, if educators request it, I will drive an audit to make sure that no public dollars are being spent on union-busting in charter schools.

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.

Schools are strong when they have the resources to offer high quality education to all students in a safe, supportive environment. That means enough funding for: enough staff to give students the attention they need; appropriate class sizes; a full range of educational programming, including arts and foreign languages; and social, emotional behavioral support.

We need a better, more equitable plan to support neighborhood schools. That starts with a moratorium on new charter school openings. In recent years, poorly regulated charter schools have closed and disrupted students’ education. We need better oversight practices before licensing more charter schools. Further, the proliferation of new charter schools has contributed to declining enrollment and funding for DCPS schools, esp. in Wards 7 and 8. The plan should also make closing DCPS schools a last resort, including by requiring schools with declining enrollment to first try sharing space with child care centers or community organizations.

20. Will you support an update to the 2007 PERAA 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.

Yes. DC's educators know what our kids need to learn and thrive, and their ideas should drive education policy in the District—including by running for elected office.