

**People's Alliance PAC 2008 Questionnaire for School Board Candidates  
Consolidated District B**

**Candidate's name: Heidi H. Carter**

- 1. What strengths and/or skills do you have that would make you a good Durham Public Schools School Board member?** I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to hone my school board skills during my current term in office. Being a good listener who tries to understand all sides of the complex issues we face, I am a consensus seeker and builder. I am fair-minded and balanced in my approach to decision-making, and I am organized, conscientious and well-prepared for school board meetings and all other duties. My educational background and work experience as a scientist have grounded me in the importance of collecting and reviewing data in order to make the best decisions. I have the ability and desire to form relationships with potential community partners in order to strengthen our schools and better address the social needs and gaps of our disadvantaged students. I am a good communicator and am steadfastly responsive to our constituents' questions and concerns. It is important to me to keep sight of the big picture when identifying and addressing the challenges we face. I wholeheartedly believe in the importance of strong public education as the cornerstone of democracy, as an essential construct of society's commitment to helping all children become productive citizens, and as a bastion of equality to promote an understanding of and respect for our social and cultural differences.
  
- 2. Please discuss your community activities.** I am currently a member of the DPS Board of Education elected from Consolidated District B. I devote myself to the work of the Board in close to a full-time capacity by attending school and community events, serving on our school board subcommittees, serving as Chair of the Instructional Services Committee, responding to constituents, visiting schools, interacting with elected officials and DPS administrators, advocating for the items on our legislative agenda, acting as an ambassador of Durham Public Schools in order to promote them in our community, and working to form partnerships with key collaborators in our community. I serve on numerous advisory boards and committees in our community and state such as the Durham Workforce Development Board, the Workforce Youth Council, the DPS School Health Advisory Council, the DPS Student Advisory Council, the Triangle Fitness Leadership Council, the Student U. Advisory Board, the Crayons to Computers Board, the NC Department of Public Health Successful Students Move More Committee, the NC Action for Healthy Kids steering committee and as chair of the NC Action for Healthy Kids Advocacy Committee. I have been actively involved in my 4 children's schools as a tutor, a PTA activist and Site-Based Decision-Making Committee member throughout their schooling. I also am active in the Woodcroft Community Association and have worked to increase its participation in the Interneighborhood Council. My husband and I worked for a dozen years as volunteers in the Woodcroft Athletic Association as team organizers.

**3. What are some ways that Durham Public Schools can reduce the achievement gap?** Durham Public Schools leaders are attacking this challenge from multiple angles since it is a complex problem. We have a number of programs and initiatives underway to address all achievement gaps. I think our most compelling charge now is to ensure that our programs are properly implemented in every school in the district. As School Board members, we must continue to focus all of our decisions on raising student achievement.

We must ensure that all schools have high expectations for student learning, that all students are exposed to a rigorous curriculum, that the curriculum is aligned with state and district standards, and that it is consistent for every subject in every classroom in the district. We are doing this by providing our teachers with an online instructional organizer (RIO) with pacing guides, sample lessons and assessments for all core subjects that are lined up with the benchmark testing the district provides. The data from these assessments is used in a diagnostic fashion so that teachers know what their students know, what they don't know, and can then redirect instruction to students to lift achievement. Students who need additional help will be identified, and schools will be able to intervene throughout the year to provide extra instructional help or accelerated lessons according to each student's needs. This standardization of course curricula throughout the district should help improve all student achievement, and may be especially beneficial to our highly mobile students.

We must also continue to attract the best teachers to our district and be sure our most academically challenged students have access to the best teachers. We must also continue to hire the best principals who will be instructional leaders in their schools.

Each school in our district must continue to implement the Professional Learning Communities (PLC). In this program, teachers of like subject matter work and plan together, share best teaching practices, develop common assessments, and discuss ways to improve the performance of their students. The School Board has been very supportive of this reform technique, by providing for the early dismissal of students one day per month in order for teachers to have protected PLC work time. Teachers are telling us this is very valuable to them in their work.

Another approach to addressing the achievement gap is at the school level. DPS will continue to assess each school for its unique set of needs and will allocate resources accordingly. This will often mean that schools with a higher proportion of students on Free and Reduced Lunch will receive additional financial and human resource support from the district Central Office. Additionally, the Superintendent and his Executive Leadership Team (ELT) will continue their system of data review of each school's benchmark scores and other information on our schools' score cards. Based on the schools' data, the ELT will work with principals and teachers to identify and remedy weaknesses, build school instructional capacity, and lift student achievement.

There are many other ways that DPS is working to reduce the achievement gap. These include the following: Positive Behavior Support; Central Office

Parent Involvement Coordinator to increase parent outreach programs, such as Parent Academies, Kitchen Table Conversations, Be Our Guest dinners, Community Learning Centers; establishment of small learning environments at WG Pearson Middle School, Performance Learning Center, Hillside New Tech, Southern School of Engineering, City of Medicine Academy, Middle and Early College High Schools; AVID in all high schools and middle schools and expanding to elementary schools; Balanced Literacy Framework model in all elementary and middle schools; relationship building techniques via Capturing Kids Hearts staff development; increasing access to AIG- licensed teachers and honors/AP courses for all students; improving the nutritional standards of all foods and beverages consumed on our school campuses; alternatives to suspension; improved In-School Suspension to promote academic performance and behavior modification; Block Scheduling in our high schools which provides opportunities for course repeats, foundation courses, and “double-dipping” for students who may be behind; and more.

I believe that we will only be able to fully eliminate the achievement gaps when society is able to eliminate the disparities in housing, healthcare, and pre-school opportunities between social classes. DPS leaders must continue to reach out to our community for its support in increasing access to physical and mental health care, housing, and pre-school opportunities for our disadvantaged students. We also must mobilize the business community, the great universities located in Durham, the churches, the civic clubs, the agencies of city and county government, the groups that comprise our county’s System of Care, the taxpayers, and individual volunteers in order to ensure our success.

**4. Describe the current situation in terms of the drop-out rate and suspension rate in Durham Public Schools. What do you know about current programs that are in place to address these issues? What more can be done?**

The drop-out rate in DPS continues to be too high, despite a decrease in 06/07 for the 5<sup>th</sup> straight year. The number of students who have dropped out of our schools has decreased while the population of DPS high school students has increased. The number of students in grades 7-12 who dropped out in 06/07 was 516 compared to 535 for the previous year. This is a rate of 3.44% for DPS compared to 3.6% for the state. The number of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out in 06/07 was 508 (4.9% rate) compared to 520 (5.15% rate) the previous year. This is a rate of 4.9% for DPS compared to 5.24% for the state.

The cohort high school 4-year graduation rate is 68.8% for 06/07. The dropout rates for African American and Hispanic students are even higher. While this is a nationwide trend, DPS leaders know we must redouble our efforts to increase the high school completion rate of all our students.

Some of the current programs in place to address the drop-out issue are:

- Creation of smaller learning environments as alternatives to the large comprehensive high schools, such as the Performance Learning Center, Hillside New Tech High School, Southern School of

Engineering, Early College High School, Middle College High School, City of Medicine Academy

- Establishment of Ninth-grade Freshman Academies at our high schools to help with the transition of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders to high school
- Increased access to counseling and social services via Child and Family Support Teams and the Durham System of Care
- Efforts to reduce truancy, such as truancy courts, truancy officers, strict follow-up parent contact procedures for truant students
- Increased mentoring and internship opportunities
- Improved CTE offerings, such as the Construction and Design Academy at Southern High School and Hillside Finance Academy
- Small program for high school students in need of flexible schedule or additional help at Southern High School during extended day hours
- Mid-year graduation opportunity
- Lakeview School as an alternative school for long-term suspended students
- On-line credit recovery options
- Transition to Opportunity forums for recent drop-outs to offer reading level assessments and individual counseling about opportunities both within and outside DPS
- Homeless liaison services
- School Wellness Centers
- Personal Education Plans
- Student Assistance Program
- Capturing Kids Hearts and Teen Leadership
- Futures for Kids, a portal for career exploration to guide high school coursework planning and selection for 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders
- High School and Beyond plans for every high school student developed with students by counselors and career development coordinators
- Community Learning Centers at Oxford Manor, McDougald Terrace, and Cornwallis Community
- Parent and Community Involvement Coordinator
- Student U and Summer Restoration Institute for Leadership

An important precursor to dropouts is truancy. Efforts to reduce truancy might include the creation of a Truancy Triage Center where truant students can be dropped off for an academic and social needs assessment, followed up with the appropriate services to help keep the students in school. DPS also must continue to improve its Career and Technical Education (CTE) and well-structured school-to-career programs. We must push forward with the Holton School Vocational Training project in partnership with the City and County. Another approach to this problem involves DPS continuing to connect with business partners for job shadowing and internships for students, as well as connect with other community partners for increased access to mentors, mental health and social services for our

students to help them stay in school and graduate. DPS should place increased emphasis on System of Care with earlier identification of students who may need its resources.

In the 2004-2005 school year, our suspension rate plummeted by nearly 50%, and our methods for its decrease were studied as best practices by districts around the state. The Superintendent studies the discipline data from each school and works with the principals to identify and support teachers and classrooms that have high suspension numbers in a targeted effort to improve behavior by methods other than suspension. We did see an increase in suspensions for the 2006-2007 school year, and we have asked our administration to carefully monitor this situation to make sure schools are making every effort to keep kids in school.

DPS is working to implement Positive Behavior Support systems in all of our schools, where appropriate behavior is taught to our students and is rewarded on a proactive basis. For students who have behavior challenges, the Student Assistance Teams at our schools conduct behavior assessments and develop behavior plans for the students working with teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and parents to improve behavior outcomes. Suspensions should be a last resort consequence or reserved for behavior infractions that are a threat to school safety and student security. District leaders are also continuing to find ways to improve the In-School Suspension program so that it supports academic performance, modifies behavior, positively shapes student character, and provides emotional and social counseling to students, as needed. We must continue to find and fund other discipline alternatives to suspension to support our principals in their efforts to keep our schools safe and orderly and to keep kids in school.

**5. What are some of the programs that are working well in Durham Public Schools?** Programs that are working well in DPS include many of those listed above to help promote high school completion, as well as the following:

- Small school initiatives
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Capturing Kids' Hearts
- Choice Programs and year-round schools
- Positive Behavior Support Systems
- Middle School and High School Reform efforts
- School Health and Student Wellness initiatives
- Encore! Middle School After-school programs
- Dual Immersion Program at Southwest Elementary
- Advanced Academics and AIG Programs
- Arts Programs and Athletics Programs
- Meaningful Professional Development
- Professional Learning Communities
- Riverdeep Instructional Organizer
- NC WISE

- Full-release Teacher Mentor Program

- 6. What process, if any, should be in place in Durham Public Schools to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the middle management level within the system?** There is a process for middle management evaluation that includes evaluation by upper level management for effective completion of responsibilities and implementation of assigned duties. This process should also include an evaluative piece based on feedback from teachers and those with whom the middle managers work in the schools. Perhaps this evaluation piece could take the form of a survey by an independent group.
- 7. What principles should be used for determining student assignment? What should be done about over-crowding in some schools?** Student assignments should be made based upon proximity to schools, prevention of assignment zone islands or peninsulas, and the provision for an alignment in assignment of neighborhoods to elementary, middle, and high schools. Additionally, the principle and core belief of the school board that all students benefit from being educated in racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse environments should be promoted. Student assignments also should be the least disruptive as possible for families.

To prevent and alleviate over-crowding, DPS must invest resources in more sophisticated long-range demographic planning that is coordinated with planning of the City and County governments in order to predict and provide the sufficient infrastructure to support the population growth. DPS must also plan with the County government for bond packages to provide funding for capital needs and construction, similar to the planning that has led to the successful passage of the 2007 School Bond.

The School Board should also advocate for additional revenue sources for capital construction, such as the real estate transfer tax, and should encourage the County to place this item on a referendum for voter approval in the near future.

- 8. What are the educational needs of the Latino students in Durham and what steps are being taken to meet these needs? What additional steps, if any, should be taken?** Durham needs to find the resources to provide additional teachers certified in English as a Second Language to work with our rapidly growing Hispanic population to improve the students' literacy skills. DPS should increase efforts to assist teachers in the ESL certification process by working with local universities to provide the ESL licensure training at a reduced cost or at cost paid by the school district. A similar project is underway for the AIG certification of more of our teachers, and it has been very successful.

DPS must also continue efforts to increase the number of Hispanic students who are identified as AIG and who are taking honors and AP courses in high school. We also must find more ways to provide support for these students to help them be successful in these classes. Additionally, our school board and district leaders should advocate at the state level for the ability of undocumented Latino students to be allowed admission to our state's technical colleges. These

students need this opportunity to motivate them to complete high school and to give them a fair chance to be productive members of our community.

DPS is also investigating the establishment of additional dual immersion opportunities for our students. We have hired a full-time Foreign Language Coordinator for the District who will coordinate efforts with our ESL District Coordinator to determine the feasibility of this project. The district has one dual immersion class at Southwest Elementary that is very successful in lifting the achievement of both native English speakers as well as the ESL students.

A report that has recently been released to our community indicates that Hispanic students are at increased risk for adolescent mental health problems, including depression, substance abuse, and suicide risk. DPS should continue to increase access to mental health services for these students, since these mental health needs are directly linked to academic performance and school success. We have mental health services on-site at Watts Elementary School; we will be evaluating the impact of program on the well-being and achievement of students, and expand services as possible.

- 9. What are your plans for rewarding and retaining good teachers?** Plans include continuing to provide a supplement to the state's salary for our teachers based upon years of experience. This is essential in order to attract, retain, and compete with neighboring districts for the best teachers. Other financial rewards might be considered, such as bonuses for teachers working in schools with high needs, bonuses for teachers whose students achieve expected academic growth, or bonuses to attract teachers in high-demand/low-supply academic areas.

The district must continue to improve the working conditions of our teachers as well by enhancing support from principals, providing support from our unique, innovative full-release mentoring program for our initially licensed teachers, by providing opportunities for teachers to work together in Professional Learning Communities, by providing them with leadership opportunities and other opportunities for empowerment and intrinsic reward, by offering quality Professional Development they request, by ensuring clean and safe schools with adequate instructional resources, and by our ongoing daily support.

We want the best teachers for all of our students, and the best teachers want to be creative in their pedagogy so they can inspire students to high levels of achievement. We can empower teachers by providing them with accessible, excellent professional development opportunities. We can support their work towards pinnacles of teaching excellence like National Board Certification. We can offer them opportunities for advanced graduate study, for AIG certification, AVID certification, IB certification, ESL certification and more. We can continue to partner with our local universities to offer high level professional development that is affordable to teachers.

Further, DPS should continue to investigate ways to promote staff well-being, such as the provision of fitness and nutrition opportunities at reduced cost to employees.

