NYC Kids PAC

Candidate Survey for Mayoral Candidates

Please return by Monday, July 8th to info@nyckidspac.org

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Candidate's full name	Sal F. Albanese
Staff contact and e-mail	Todd Brogan, todd@salalbanese2013.com
Phone number	347-201-3725

Governance

Many New York City parents feel disenfranchised by the current system of mayoral control over public education and feel there are few checks and balances. Only 22% of New Yorkers believe that mayoral control should continue in its present form after the state legislature revisits the issue in 2015.

	Yes	No
Would you support changes to the system that would give parents a significant voice in decision-making and/or provide checks and balances to the current system?	**Y**	
Which of the following changes to what is now called the Panel for Education Policy (the *de facto* Board of Education) would you support? Please check as many as you like.	Yes	No
• A directly elected Board of Education		**N**
• A reconstituted Board of Education with a majority not appointed by the Mayor		**N**
• Community Education Councils (CECs) selecting parent representatives to the Board of Education		**N**
• Having Board of Education members with set terms, who cannot be fired at will by the mayor		**Y**
• The creation of an independent committee to nominate potential Board of Education members, from which the mayor will select the actual members		**N**

Which of the following measures to ensure that parents and community members have a say in their children's schools would you support? Please check as many as you like.	Yes	No
• Expanding the powers of CECs, including giving them approval authority over school closings and co-locations?	Y	
• Authorizing municipal control; i.e., the City Council making law on educational policy, including school closings, etc.?		N
• Allowing School Leadership Teams (SLTs) to regain the power to develop school based budgets?	Y	
• Reconstituting school based committees or SLTs to select principals?		N
• Restoring the district structure, with a superintendent who supervises principals and provides access for parents with issues and problems?	Y	

Do you have other proposals to provide a stronger parent voice and/or checks and balances in school governance?

As a former New York City public school teacher and parent of public school students, I am a firm believer in restoring parent and teacher voices in the process. However, I also recall the chaos and lack of accountability in the old Board of Education system. That is why I believe in maintaining Mayoral control with fixed terms for PEP members. We can put an end to rubber stamping and to the demonization of parents and teachers by electing an educator as Mayor. As Mayor, my PEP appointees would be educators, parents, and activists, not personal friends or political cronies.

What is your view of how parents should be involved in educational decision-making? Please be as specific as possible.

As a City Council Member, I championed parental involvement in schools. I will directly appoint parents as members of my PEP, restore local control of co-locations and closings, and fight to include outreach to parents in the evaluation of principals and education leaders.

Chancellor

We have had a series of Chancellors who have required a waiver from the NYS Education Department.

The Mayor has defended his appointments based on his belief that the public education system needed a business manager.

As to the role of Chancellor, would you support:	Yes	No
• The Chancellor being chosen by Board of Education rather than the mayor?		N
• Selecting only a chancellor who does not require a waiver from the state (i.e., an educator)	Y	

In what ways would you change the Chancellor's role, if any?

With an educator as Mayor, you will also get an educator as Chancellor. That means a leader who will devote more attention and resources to supporting and uniting school communities than to dishing out data-based punishments that have adversely impacted our students and demoralized teachers.

Do you have any other proposals for changes in the Chancellor's role?

Please describe some successes you believe mayoral control of education has brought. Please describe some problems you see as well.

The single most important success is accountability. Parents, teachers, and students are rightfully angry with Mayor Bloomberg because he is directly accountable for the mess that he has caused in our schools. He has done a lousy job with mayoral control. That is why it is so important to elect a Mayor who is in touch with parents, teachers, and students, rather than adversarial toward them. The biggest failure of mayoral control is that it has been pioneered by an out-of-touch Mayor who lacks the skills or interest in communicating with school communities.

Testing

Another issue that parents feel passionately about is the need to reduce standardized testing, test prep, and their being used to evaluate schools, students, and teachers. What is your position on this matter?

Would you support:	Yes	No
• Eliminating the use of test scores as the primary basis for making promotional decisions?	Y	
• Eliminating or minimizing test being used as the primary criteria on which school grades or progress reports are based (currently, school grades are derived about 85% from test scores)?	Y	
• Eliminating school progress reports altogether?		N
• Crafting a teacher evaluation system that depends as little as possible on standardized test scores?	Y	
• Refusing to expand standardized testing into other grades (Pre-K to 2nd)?	Y	
• Pledging not to create new local standardized exams?	Y	

	Yes	No
• Opposing the creation of 3-8th grade standardized exams in subjects other than ELA, math and science?	Y	
• Making admissions to all schools based on more holistic factors, and especially Gifted & Talented programs and the specialized high schools?	Y	
• Encouraging other NYC high schools to join the portfolio/alternative assessment consortium as opposed to basing graduation decisions on the results of the Regents exams?	Y	
• Developing a non-punitive process by which NYC parents can choose to have their children opt-out of the standardized testing?	Y	

Would you propose any other policy changes in this area?

What do you think is the best use, if any, of standardized testing?

Standardized tests should first and foremost be diagnostic tools. The focus should be on student performance and improvement, not on punishment and hasty school closings. The current obsession with standardized tests is breaking the spirits of our students and neglecting those that excel in other areas, like arts, music, and sports.

Resources and equity

The last few years have seen cuts of about 14% to school budgets. Class sizes have risen, and in the early grades are at the highest level in 14 years. Art, music, science, and afterschool programs have been eliminated from many schools. How would you address these issues? How would you go about guaranteeing the civil rights of all students and providing them with an equitable opportunity to learn, regardless of their background?

More specifically would you:	Yes	No
• Ensure that school budgets remain stable and/or increase in the future?	Y	
• Set reduced class size goals to achieve by the end of your first term?	Y	
• Comply with the plan the city adopted in 2007, as a response to the Contracts for Excellence state law, which calls for class size reduction in all grades?	Y	
• Commit to spending a larger percent of the city budget on reducing class size,	Y	

and if necessary, raise revenue to fund this?		
• Re-evaluate "fair student funding" to discern whether it has provided more equity or, instead, incentives to principals to increase class size and/or get rid of their experienced teachers?	**Y**	

How would you address the need to reduce class size, the top priority of parents on the DOE's own surveys?

A 21st century classroom is not one with 40 students and one overwhelmed teacher. Class size matters, and we cannot keep pretending that it does not. Conventional wisdom says that New York City simply does not have room to expand classroom space and reduce class size. I disagree. If we have room to build new stadiums and other major developments, then we have room to expand our schools. As Mayor, I will reprioritize the way we develop our neighborhoods to ensure that space for classrooms grows.

How would you ensure that children are provided with a well-rounded education, including art, music, science, and physical education, and how would you fund this?

Education is about much more than the three Rs. As a young immigrant growing up in Brooklyn, it was the libraries, sports programs, and other activities that kept me engaged in academic subjects. As Mayor, I will restore music, arts, and sports programs so that kids who may not be immediately intrigued by academic subjects are still inspired to stay in school and maintain good grades.

How would you go about developing and supporting measures to attract and retain experienced and high-quality teachers?

As a young student teacher in Queens, I received cursory support and training. That is no way to prepare the people who prepare our children. As Mayor, I will launch a Teacher-in-Residency program in which soon-to-be teachers spend their final year in college side-by-side with professional educators in a New York City classroom. Once they enter the teaching corps, they will be paired with a mentor for two years to help enhance their curriculum development and teaching style.

Our schools have become increasingly segregated over time. How would you address the goal of increasing diversity in NYC public schools? Please be specific.

Diversity is essential to great schools. I'm a big believer in public education as a way to socialize our kids, to teach them how to study, work, and learn with people of all backgrounds. I'll re-evaluate admissions policies at our schools, especially at specialized high schools, to ensure that every child benefits from a diverse learning environment.

Any other comments on resources and/or equity?

School facilities

Overcrowding is a chronic and ever-worsening problem in NYC schools. The city has underinvested in school facilities over the last decade, resulting in most of our students attending schools in overcrowded and/or substandard conditions. There are thousands of children on waiting lists for their zoned elementary schools. Mandatory Kindergarten, expanded Pre-K and community schools with wrap-around services will require even more space. And yet the current capital plan does not have enough new seats to keep up with future enrollment growth, not to mention eliminating existing overcrowding or reducing class size.

Do you support any of the following measures? Please check all that apply.	Yes	No
• A more ambitious capital plan that would provide the space necessary to eliminate overcrowding and allow for smaller classes, as well as devotes sufficient funds to maintenance and repair.	**Y**	
• Invest a larger percentage of the city's overall capital spending towards these goals.	**Y**	
• Reform the blue book formula so it more accurately reflects overcrowding and incorporates the need for smaller classes.	**Y**	
• Commit to providing transparent enrollment projections.	**Y**	
• Require developers to provide space for schools in overcrowded areas or pay "impact" fees into a fund for school construction.	**Y**	

Do you have any other proposals to address overcrowding?

As the only Mayoral candidate not accepting contributions from developers, I'm liberated to negotiate fairly on behalf of our students. Great neighborhoods need school space, library space, and hospital space as much as they need luxury condos.

Privatization

DOE is spending more than $4 billion this year on private contracts, which represents the fastest growing part of its budget. More and more educational and support services are being outsourced and the budget for charter schools is approaching $1 billion.

Would you:	Yes	No
• Reduce the spending on privatization, outsourcing, contracts and consultants?	**Y**	
If your answered yes to the above question, how would you do so?		
Experience has shown us that privatization and outsourcing often lacks the oversight needed to root our fraud and corruption. As Mayor, I plan to move as many services as possible in-house, where they can be closely regulated.		
• Prevent the awarding of contracts to companies that have already been shown to have stolen funds or are suspected of corruption?	**Y**	
If your answered yes to the above question, how would you do so?		
I will work closely with the City Council, state legislators, and the city Comptroller to ensure that we are not handing over precious taxpayer funds to known offenders.		
• Support the continued expansion of charter schools?		**N**
• Support the practice of co-locating charter schools in existing DOE facilities?		**N**
• Enforce the provisions in state law, which requires co-located charter schools to pay for the services and space that they now currently receive from the DOE for free?		**N**

How would you work to ameliorate the divide and inequities between the charter school community and those in district public schools?

Too often, public school students who share space with co-located charters have told me that they feel like second-class citizens. That simply cannot be tolerated as we move forward.

Any other comments on privatization?

School closings, small schools and online learning

Mayor Bloomberg will have closed more than 150 schools during his administration, and created more than 450 new small schools. Most parents opposed these school closings because they disrupted our children's education and displaced the neediest students elsewhere. There is also discontent with the

requirement that all new schools be small; i.e. 400 students or less; which leads to an inefficient use of resources and space, and difficulty in providing students with advanced coursework and a full range of extra-curricular activities. The rapid expansion of online learning has also been among this administration's priorities, replacing the personal contact between student and teacher by delivering course content and instruction through computers and software.

Would you:	Yes	No
• Continue the Bloomberg-era policy of closing schools and forming new schools, or instead pledge to do more to improve existing schools?		**N**
• Relax the requirement that all new schools be of a small size?	**Y**	
• Ensure that students have full, face-to-face, in-person access to teacher, or continue to expand online learning as the alternative?	**Y**	

Other comments on school closures/new schools/online learning?

School closings should be a last resort, not a first step. As a City Council Member, I worked closely with the school community to redesign what was then known as Bay Ridge High School. When the community is supportive of a redesign, it can be very successful. But without that community approval, it usually fails to achieve desired goals.

Transparency

Even experts at the Independent Budget Office say the DOE's budget has become less transparent than in the past, making it difficult if not impossible for parents and advocates to learn what funds are being spent on, not to mention give input about possible improvements in spending & priorities. Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests are rarely responded to, and never promptly, and there is much data that the DOE refuses to disclose, such as results of surveys and enrollment projections.

Which of the following measures to increase overall transparency would you carry out? Please check all that apply.	Yes	No
• Itemized, fully detailed breakdowns of education budget comparable to other city agencies	**Y**	
• Respond to FOILs in a timely and complete fashion	**Y**	

• Provide an online log which reports on which FOILs have been submitted and when they were responded to, with a link to the results [along the model of the Illinois board of education; see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/foia/default.htm]	**Y**	
• More accurate reporting of class size and overcrowding	**Y**	

Any other suggestions as to how to increase transparency?

Special education

Under the current special education reform, schools are required to accommodate children with a large variety of special needs in general education or inclusion classes, often resulting in their being placed in extremely large class or with a teacher who is not adequately trained. In fact, principals have been instructed to accommodate children with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) in general education classes up to the legal limit (32 children per class in most elementary grades). While parents understand the benefits of inclusion, they worry that sufficient resources and staffing are not being provided either to meet the needs of students with disabilities or the rest of the students in the class.

Would you:	Yes	No
• Promise to release reports twice a year, showing how many students have IEPs that are out of compliance?	**Y**	
• Agree to commission a report, in consultation with Citywide Council on Special Education and the District 75 Citywide Council, by an independent research group on the implementation of the special education reform, including survey results from parents, students, administrators and educators at the school level	**Y**	
• Commission a study, again by an independent expert, analyzing the causes of the increase in the number and percent of students diagnosed with special needs? Such numbers have been on the increase in NYC in the past five years.	**Y**	

How will you make sure that the needs of students with disabilities are met, that they are provided with the individual attention and smaller classes that they require, and that the funding provided is sufficient and is properly spent to achieve these goals?

This is, quite simply, a matter of priorities. As a school teacher, I, another educator, and two paraprofessionals worked with students who were often considered "out of the mainstream." Today, many of those students would be in special education, yet they would have fewer resources and less individualized attention. It's simply not right. We need a Mayor who will prioritize special education

students, rather than push them to the side.

Estimates are that 25% of special needs students in NYC do not receive their mandated services. How would you ensure that all students with disabilities receive their services promptly?

In an Albanese administration, a failure to deliver mandated services would not be tolerated. I will direct my Chancellor to ensure that services are delivered on time and equitably.

How would your administration deal with the over-representation/identification of students of color in special education?

The elephant in the room is poverty. Poverty causes stress, and stress causes developmental issues. Children in low-income communities enter our classrooms far behind their higher-income peers, and they often never catch up. They are referred to special education, which is costly for parents and taxpayers. I plan to merge early education programs under a Department of Early Learning, increasing access for low-income students and students of color. I will also launch pediatric wellness centers in every borough. Using a multidisciplinary approach, parents, doctors, and teachers will work together to ensure that children 0-3 years of age receive the attention, nutrition, and preparation they need to succeed. This is the cornerstone of my education policy.

Other suggestions to improve opportunities for students with disabilities?

Other policies

Cellphone ban

Most parents believe that for safety reasons their children should be allowed to carry cellphones to and from school. Would you continue the official policy of prohibiting students from bringing their cell phones to school?

Yes	No
	N

Privacy protections

The state and the city are currently sharing highly sensitive, personally identifiable student data with a corporation named inBloom Inc., which is storing it on a vulnerable data cloud and making it available to

for-profit vendors without parental consent. At the same time, inBloom has stated it will not be held responsible if the data leaks out either in storage or transmission.

Would you agree to:	Yes	No
• Pull NYC student data out of the inBloom cloud as soon as possible?	**Y**	
• Pledge not to share personally identifiable student data with *any third party* without parental consent?	**Y**	

School to prison

Many parents and advocates are concerned by the number of police in our schools and the high rate of students who are arrested for minor offenses. What would you do to protect children with minor behavioral issues from being suspended or otherwise forced into the school to prison pipeline?

Giving our students a criminal record is quite possibly the worst thing we can do. I want to reform the school safety system and, as stated earlier, focus on early intervention. By intervening early in a child's life, we can help him or her gain the skills needed to avoid encounters with law enforcement and stay focused on succeeding in school.

Credit recovery

To inflate their graduation rates, some schools have implemented sub-standard credit recovery programs based on online learning or packets of homework that allow students who have failed their courses to graduate on time. How would you address this issue to ensure that receiving a high school diploma actually means that a student is equipped to become a productive citizen?

The root of these "work arounds" is the current obsession with high-stakes testing. Teachers and administrators feel pressured to meet quantity-, rather than quality-based metrics. We need to restore a focus on providing a real, quality education.

Open-ended questions

Please summarize your record of achievements in public education as a policymaker.

As a New York City school teacher, I spent 11 years in the classroom working with students who often faced serious challenges, from domestic disputes to gang violence. As a City Council Member, I championed parental involvement in school districts and implemented mandatory drug testing for school bus drivers to ensure that our students were transported safely. I also worked with my local school community to redesign Bay Ridge High School and turn it into one of the best-performing schools in the

city. As Mayor, I will continue that record of achievements.

Please describe the ways in which, as a public official, you have demonstrated responsiveness to parental concerns or community members in the area of public education?

(See Above)

What would be your top educational priorities if elected mayor?

The dual cornerstones of the Albanese Education Initiative are early intervention and teacher training. No matter what we do with co-locations, PEP reform, or testing, we will continue to see failure unless we make pediatric wellness a priority and commit to working with parents and students in low-income communities. But that alone is not enough. We also need to invest in our teachers so that they have the training, expertise, and skills needed to prepare our students for success.

How would your approach differ from the current Mayor, and in what ways would you emulate his policies?

I will continue to embrace Mayoral control of schools and increase funding, as Mayor Bloomberg has done. But on almost every other issue, we part ways. I will end the demonization of teachers, the brushing off of parents, and the obsession with high-stakes testing. I will give local communities a real voice in the future of their schools. I will strike at the root of our failing schools, which is poverty.

Anything else you would like to share?

Please see my attached education plan, "The Smartest City in the World."

	Yes	No
Would you agree for a member of our group to interview you in person, if we have follow up questions?	**Y**	

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer our questions.