



Candidate Survey for Public Advocate Office

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Governance

Many New York City parents feel disenfranchised by the current system of mayoral control over public education and that there are few if any checks and balances. Though the Public Advocate may not have a direct influence on whether mayoral control will be changed or renewed in 2015, it is important to know what position he or she will take in the debate.

Which of the following changes to what is now called the Panel for Education Policy (the <i>de facto</i> Board of Education) would you support? Please check as many as you like.	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A directly elected Board of Education 		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reconstituted Board of Education with a majority not appointed by the Mayor 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Education Councils (CECs) selecting parent representatives to the Board of Education 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of Education members with set terms, who cannot be fired at will 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of an independent committee to nominate potential Board of Education members, from which the mayor will select the actual members 	X	
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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the powers of CECs, including giving them approval over school closings and co-locations 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizing municipal control; i.e., the City Council with the power to legislate on educational policy, as it does with other city agencies 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing School Leadership Teams (SLTs) to regain the power to develop 	X	

school based budgets		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstituting school based committees or SLTs to select principals 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoring the district structure, with a superintendent who supervises principals and provides access for parents with issues and problems 	X	

If you are elected public advocate, how will you fight for a stronger parental voice, particularly if the new mayor continues the Bloomberg administration’s agenda?

- As PA, I see my role as a watch dog ensuring that all city agencies are providing the services required by law to the people of NYC. That said, I would be the eyes, ears and voice for the parents and care takers of the children attending public school, making sure the DOE is providing the required and state mandated services to all the children.
- As Public Advocate my role would assist parents helping them navigate the Department of Education. My office would be open to providing workshops to meet the needs of parents.
- My role will not only to be an advocate but to represent parents who have been marginalized and give them a voice they deserve.
- As a City Council Member my office has always worked closely with Community Education Council (CEC) and the Committee for Children with Special Education (CCSE), I would continue this city wide, working collaboratively on community school needs and ensuring they are met.
- PEP members should be mandated to attend CEC meeting city wide.
- CEC members should vote on all or any changes made to schools in their district. This vote must be made public at the PEP members.

If you are elected public advocate, do you have any ideas or initiatives to put forward to ensure checks and balances in the running of our public schools?

- Require DOE budget process to be more transparent, as it pertains to contracts, out sourcing, funding of charter schools.
- Require better integration and coordination of mandated services to schools.
- Recommend stronger oversight regarding the issuing of charter schools.
- Require and fund professional development on instruction, methodologies, disabilities, assistive technology, and IDEA for all teachers and administrators.
- Continue (as part of the law suit) to fight for the \$3 billion in court –ordered state funding owed to New York City to reduce class size as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Testing

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

Would you support:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate the use of test scores as the primary basis for making promotional 	X	

decisions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate or minimizing test scores as the primary criteria to judge schools (currently, school progress report grades are derived about 85% from test scores) 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate school progress reports altogether 		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crafting a teacher evaluation system that depends as little as possible on standardized test scores 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging more NYC high schools to join the portfolio/alternative assessment consortium rather than basing graduation on the results of Regents exams 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a non-punitive process by which NYC parents can choose to have their children opt-out of the standardized testing 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fighting against the test score based accountability even if the new mayor continues it 	X	

If you answered yes to the last question above, how would you help ensure our children, teachers and administrators are not judged based on test scores?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be the role of the PA to represent parents who decide to opt out of standardized testing. The current adversarial atmosphere undermines the essential partnership between educators and families needed to support learning. Involved parents are an important ingredient to ensure a strong school-system.
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As public advocate, what other ideas/initiatives if any would you put forward on the issue of testing?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testing is an end result; we know that a lot happens in and out of school that contributes to a child's education. The evaluation of students must be judged holistically and over time. One test cannot measure the success in learning and development. That said I support Community Schools, a comprehensive model the reflect a holistic approach to a healthy child and youth development. Studies show that reduced dropout rate, and improved behavior academic gains in reading and math, greater parent involvement.
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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. As public advocate, what would your position be on the following issues?

More specifically would you support:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That school budgets remain stable and/or increase in the future 	X	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that the city complies with its state mandated plan to reduce class size in all grades 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that the city complies with the state law which calls for robust public input, including borough hearings, into the city's class size reduction plan 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-evaluate "fair student funding" to discern whether it provides real equity or incentives to principals choose between increasing class size and discarding their experienced teachers? 	X	

As public advocate, what ideas/initiatives if any would you put forward on issues of class size and funding?

- Reduced class size provides students with many benefits: greater opportunities for participation, greater individual attention, and improved instruction. Conflicting interpretations and the implications for policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels make research on class size and teacher workload controversial. Yet, a current analysis of long-term studies and recent grassroots research reveals that class size does indeed have a major impact on student achievement, behavior, and attention (see Bracey, "Research").
- Student achievement increases significantly in classes of fewer than 20. Smaller classes, complemented by diverse teaching methods, create better student performance, more positive attitudes, and fewer discipline problems. Students and parents have the right to expect classrooms with these characteristics
- As PA I would challenge the next mayor to demand that Albany recommit Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Money is key to our school system when it is targeted to struggling schools. Class size decreases when funding increases.
- Advocate for school funding based on need.
- Advocate for the re allocation of funding (charters have received almost a \$1 billion, and DOE has private contracts of more than \$4 billion) within the DOE budget to ensure that priorities like class size, libraries, etc. are met.

Any ideas/initiatives you might offer as Public Advocate on how to help ensure that students are provided with a well-rounded education, including art, music, science, and physical education?

- Due to co-locations many of our schools have lost space and are unable to provide the well-rounded education every child deserves. As PA I would encourage the Mayor/DOE to reevaluate co-locations that have infringed on space of schools that are not meeting the state mandated requirements for the arts and PE.
- I would ask all arts organizations and city museums that receive public funding to adopt schools throughout the 5 boroughs.

Our schools have become increasingly segregated over time. As Public Advocate, what ideas/ initiatives would you offer to address the goal of increasing diversity in NYC public schools?

- Present DOE policies for middle school and H.S. admission, school choice (screened schools, specialized) need to be re-evaluated.
- Expand the programs that help children of color prepare for tests for screened and specialized schools.
- Schools that are struggling or underutilized should be provided with educational programming that attract all families from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Any other comments on how you as Public Advocate might work to improve resources and/or equity in our public schools?

- Poor and struggling schools have been starved; many of these schools have high needs students and ELL students. The current policy is to replace these schools with Charter schools that in some cases attract a more diverse student body. **As PA I would encourage the Mayor/DOE to fund struggling schools appropriately based on their high need. Funding schools appropriately will help schools diversify.**

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.

Which if any of the following measures would you support? Please check all that apply.	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more ambitious capital plan that would provide the space necessary to eliminate overcrowding and allow for smaller classes, as well as sufficient funds to maintenance and repair. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest a larger percentage of the city's overall capital spending towards these goals. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform the blue book formula so it more accurately reflects overcrowding and incorporates the need for smaller classes. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require transparent enrollment projections. 	X	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose that developers must provide space for schools in overcrowded areas or pay “impact” fees into a fund for school construction. 	X	
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As public advocate, what ideas/initiatives would you put forward to address school overcrowding?

As PA I would legislate that there should be a moratorium on school co-locations until the “**Blue Book**” is redefined and represents available space across the entire school system.

Privatization

DOE is spending more than \$4 billion this year on private contracts, which represents the fastest growing part of its budget. The budget for charter schools alone is approaching \$1 billion.

Would you support:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the spending on privatization, outsourcing, contracts and consultants 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent the awarding of contracts to companies that have been shown to have stolen funds or are suspected of corruption 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halting the continued expansion of charter schools 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ceasing the practice of co-locating charter schools in existing DOE facilities 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support requiring that co-located charter schools pay for the services and space that they currently receive from the DOE for free 	X	

As public advocate, what ideas/initiatives if any would you put forward on the issues of privatization and contracts?

- We need to minimize the number of outside contracts. We also need to hold vendors of those contracts more accountable to what the contract outlines. If vendors cannot meet the requirements of awarded contracts then they should be removed or told they will have to absorb any additional cost overruns. We also have a trained workforce that can do the work that is being outsourced.

As public advocate, what ideas/initiatives would you propose to ameliorate the divide and inequities between charter schools and district public schools?

- All co-locations of charter schools should cease.
- Charter schools should be responsible for finding their own space.
- Charter schools should not compete with public schools.
- For chain Charter schools they should pay rent for the space they occupy in public schools. For small one of a kind Charter schools they should pay an administrative overhead fee.

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 oppose school closings because they severely disrupt children’s education and merely displace the neediest students elsewhere. There is also discontent with the DOE’s policy that all new schools are 400 students or less; which leads to an inefficient use of resources and space, and makes it difficult to give students advanced coursework and a full range of extra-curricular activities. The rapid expansion of online learning has also been a priority of this administration, delivering course content and instruction through computers and software.

Would you support:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on improving existing schools rather than continuing the Bloomberg policy of closing schools and forming new ones 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relax the requirement that all new schools be of a small size 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to expand online learning as the alternative to instruction and personal contact from teachers 		X

If you answered yes to any of the above, how would you counter-balance a Mayor with a different agenda?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each schools needs must be accessed in the context in which the school is located. Schools are a part of the larger community and that plays an important role in how students will succeed academically and developmentally. Services and support should be given accordingly.

As public advocate, what other ideas/initiatives would you offer, if any, in relation to school closures/new schools/online learning?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There should be a moratorium on school closing. The school experience is not only reading and writing it is a community, where relationships form, ideas are shared. On line learning cannot supplant these rites of passage.
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Transparency

The Public Advocate could take a strong role in helping to enhance transparency at the DOE. Many experts say the DOE’s budget has become even less transparent under mayoral control, making it difficult to discern how public funds are spent. Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests are rarely responded to in a timely fashion and the DOE refuses to disclose much important data.

Which of the following measures to increase overall transparency would you support? Please check all that apply.	Yes	No

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require that DOE provide itemized, detailed breakdowns of education budget similar to other city agencies 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to FOILs in a timely and complete fashion 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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] 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require more accurate reporting of class size and overcrowding 	X	

What ideas/initiatives as public advocate would your office pursue to increase transparency?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the PA, I will monitor and report on the city's compliance with the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL)

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 placement in extremely large classes or with teachers 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 to meet the needs of students with disabilities or the rest of the students in the class.

Would you consider:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Releasing regular reports, showing how many students have IEPs that are out of compliance? 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission a study 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. 	X	

As public advocate, what other ideas or initiatives, if any, would you put forward in the area of special education reform?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with mandated timelines. This starts with evaluation, and continues through every step of the process. Especially for students with disabilities Compliance with the IEP process must be at the core of the change. Students with disabilities cannot learn effectively without the foundation of the services and supports defined in the IEP. Require and fund professional development on instruction, methodologies, disabilities, assistive ,technology, and IDEA for all teachers and administrators

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.

Do you support:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pulling NYC student data out of the in Bloom cloud as soon as possible? 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That the DOE should not share personally identifiable student data with <i>any third party</i> without parental notification and consent? 	X	

As public advocate, are there any other ideas or initiatives you will propose in the area of protecting student privacy?

- Any data sharing with outside, non-government, third parties would require parental approval.

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. As public advocate, what ideas/initiatives would you put forward, if any, to help ensure that children with minor behavioral issues are not suspended or otherwise forced into the school to prison pipeline?

- The NYPD has no place in schools, unless needed for emergencies. The Department of Education must eliminate suspensions for minor infractions.
- Implement positive approaches to discipline, including guidance interventions.
- Use practices like circle dialogues and mediation to respond to conflict.
- Train school staff and educators to implement these practices in schools.

Open-ended questions

In the event your education platform as Public Advocate differs significantly from that of the new mayor, how will you fight for what you believe?

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

- Proposed legislation to notify parents of toxins in schools.
- Part of the law suit to fight for the \$3 billion in court –ordered state funding owed to New York City to reduce class size as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.
- Part of the UFT law suit to city’s bid to site schools before Bloomberg’s exit.
- Met with the Attorney General Office on behalf of parents whose children attend Charter schools with IEPs that were wrongfully suspended for over 30 days over the school year. Case is now being investigated by the AG’s office.

- Funded schools for technology, after school programs and capital improvements.

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?

- As a city Council Member of District 35 in Brooklyn, I have dedicated a staff person to handle education issues in my office. Here are some of the issues that we have responded to:
- Busing issues, during the strike I was able to make sure alternate provision were made for children and their families, especially children who had special needs.
- Working with CEC to stop co-locations and advocated on their behalf with DOE
- Helping parents navigate DOE, and advocated for i.e.: enrollment, transfers, bullying, and IEP issues.

What would be your top educational priorities if elected public advocate?

- School closures
- Review SUNY authorizations of Charter schools
- Moratorium of co-locations

Anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my concerns and ideas about public education. As a New Yorker (Brooklynite) who attended public school, I believe the education of our children should be every elected official's main concern if we want our city to remain prosperous, diverse and healthy.

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