

Jo Anne Simon – KidsPAC Questionnaire Response 2014

Jo Anne Simon is running for 52nd NYS Assembly seat in Brooklyn, vacated by Joan Millman, which covers the neighborhoods of downtown Brooklyn, Park Slope, Dumbo, Brooklyn Heights, Park Slope, Cobble Hill, Vinegar Hill, Carroll Gardens, Gowanus, Boerum Hill, and Prospect Heights.

Campaign website: <http://www.joannesimonforbrooklyn.com/>

Short bio: Simon is a long-time Brooklyn district leader and an attorney specializing in special education law.

Here are her responses to the NYC KidsPAC survey, sent to us Aug. 10, 2014 (with one Q added & responded on Aug. 12)

1) What is your position of the city being obligated to pay rent for charter, or give them public school space for free?

I have disagreed with the prior mayoral administration on how it sited charter schools, all too often pushing charter schools into existing public schools without regard for the effects of having done so, and not charging them rent. I believe that is not good public policy – charter schools must demonstrate ability to pay rent in order to get their charter. Therefore they should not then be enabled to exist rent-free on the public dime. Moreover, some (less wealthy and less powerfully connected) charter schools *are* paying rent, setting up inequities within the charter school community itself. I do not believe that the City should be paying rent for charter schools for the same reason I noted above.

I have worked closely with the leadership in the 52nd AD in connection with charter school incursions into public schools. The City DOE made very clear that it was not interested in listening to the concerns of parents, teachers or administrators and co-located charter schools with significant resources in traditional (and under-resourced) public schools that were poised for significant improvement and in one case, greatness. Where these charter schools have been pushed into traditional public schools, the public schools have no room to grow, because the charter has assumed their space and charter school growth has been facilitated by the City's preferential policies. Aside from the inequities, lack of transparency and accountability inherent in such processes, a number of co-locations are simply inappropriate as a matter of student safety (putting K-3 classes in a high school, for example). I have publicly testified on a number of occasions against these destructive co-location policies and practices and will continue to speak up about the inequities in charter school location and funding. I look forward to working with the new administration to ensure that traditional public schools – which educate the vast majority of our students – are fully funded and protected against the proliferation of corporate backed charter schools. I nevertheless believe that we have to move forward and work with charter schools to ensure that they too educate our children with special needs and English Language Learners and that they discipline fairly and equitably.

2) What is your position on the common core standards?

Conceptually, a “common core” of knowledge that all our children will be taught makes sense—the problems in the implementation of the Common Core has been particularly problematic in New York. The introduction of new tests as companions to the Common Core has reduced the concept to a new regime of testing for the sake of testing. Last March, I gave a workshop entitled “Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities in the Age of the Common Core.” Among the problems are the PARCC standards to which New York has subscribed and their lack of efficacy and the guidelines for implementation which are both aspirational and in many ways, wrong-headed. Implementation of these guidelines will require a long term strategy which includes proper training of teachers and administrators, and significant educational resources and technology.

3) What do you think about the current testing regime?

The current testing regime suffers from a number of serious problems, borne of faulty assumptions. First, tests do not teach. Tests are not standards. Tests must be properly validated in order for them to measure the student learning they purport to measure. No test can measure student learning comprehensively enough to be the sole barometer for decision-making about student advancement. Needless to say, such tests are not proper mechanisms for evaluation of teacher effectiveness because they have not been designed or validated for that purpose.

4) What is your position about the teacher evaluation system?

As an individual well versed in issue of test design and validity, I know that any single measure does not suffice. Multiple measures of effective teaching practices must be the basis for teacher evaluation because no alternative exists to control for measurement error or the multiple variables present. Quite simply, if the purpose of teacher evaluation is to assess which teachers are effective and enable a school to make fair employment decisions, the evaluation process must have integrity. Unless properly designed and properly validated for the purpose, no tool can yield adequate results, hence multiple measures are necessary for an evaluation process to have integrity.

5) What are your views on campaign funding?

I have long supported the clean elections campaign and campaign finance reform, including basing reform of NYS Campaign finance laws on New York City’s Campaign Finance Board model.

6) What is your position on CFE and equitable funding?

I have supported full implementation of the CFE decision since the Court of Appeals decision was issued and believe that the contracts for Excellence approach could have been better. Nevertheless, even that hasn’t been fully funded, making the CFE a somewhat hollow victory thus far. I believe strongly that class size matters a great deal. However, well trained teachers also make a huge difference in promoting learning. I support quality professional development so

as to support teachers, help them hone their skills and retain them in the system. A successful school system requires the development and retention of teachers. Otherwise we will lose good teachers from the system, which can only have a negative effect on student learning, educational outcomes, and college and career readiness.

7) What is your position on raising the charter cap?

I do not favor increasing the current charter cap.

A little further background:

I have been the female Democratic District Leader for the 52nd AD since February 2004. I have been a forceful leader in ending Vito Lopez' politics as usual in the Brooklyn Democratic Party. In 2012, I was in the forefront of the effort to force Lopez from office and adopt a series of long-overdue reforms to open up the Kings County Democratic Committee. In addition, I am a co-founder and Secretary of the New York Democratic State Committee's Progressive Caucus.

I was trained as a preschool teacher of the deaf, so early childhood education is deeply engrained. I worked in the Fairfax County Public Schools for a short time, teaching hearing impaired children at various levels. I also taught deaf-blind children in Perkins School for the Blind (akin to a 4201 school in NYS), and have worked in education advocacy through various non-profit service including as a board member of Everyone Reading (f/k/a NY Branch of the International Dyslexia Society and where I served with and learned much from our current NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina), as a member of the Professional Advisory Board of the Learning Disabilities Association, and the ARISE Coalition here in New York City. I have worked in student services and taught at various higher education programs and have been a national leader in issues surrounding the validity of standardized testing. Bio can be found on my website www.simonforbrooklyn.com

My special education experiences as a teacher, professional development trainer and advocate have prepared me to be able to hit the ground running working with schools and principals toward the benefit of our children. The past 12 years, the people most involved in running our public schools did not understand how schools work or how children learn. My stepchildren attended public schools, as have my niece and nephews. My grandchildren have attended a small charter school in Long Island City where they have experienced a very good, and truly inclusive education. As an education attorney, I have assisted many parents as they have tackled pre-K, middle school and high school admissions processes as well.