

Pete Sikora – KidsPAC Questionnaire Response 2014

Pete Sikora 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.petesikora2014.com/>

Short bio: Sikora is a long time community activist and an employee of the Communication Workers of America.

Here are his responses to the NYC KidsPAC survey, sent to us August 13.

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

Traditionally, groups who use school space are charged a fee for fair use. Around the country, it is considered the norm for charter schools, which often have more money than regular public schools, to pay rent or fees for the space they use. The city school system, which is in desperate need of more funds, could raise \$92 million for students if charter schools were charged rent. That is money needed to secure the school futures of the 1.1 million public school students in NYC. Charging charter schools rent on a sliding scale would be an equitable way of making sure that the needs of both charter school and traditional public schools are met.

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

The Common Core Curriculum sets out strong and reasonable standards, but poor implementation is robbing our kids of the education that they deserve. We need to make sure that we are integrating Common Core reasonably and cautiously into our existing school curriculum, classroom methods, and teaching styles. It is important to ensure that while implementing Common Core, we focus on the benefits of the program – strengthened math and technology curricula, experiential and differentiated learning opportunities, and applied concepts – rather than simply throwing more and more rigid tests at students.

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

The push toward rigid, exclusionary standardized testing is wrong. While tests are a valuable tool to determine certain kinds of learning in certain kinds of situations, it is not the only or best evaluation technique that exists. It has its place, along with other metrics of success and accomplishment. Educational achievement that does not focus on standardized testing is not some sort of watering down of standards; it is an overall, inclusive educational approach that produces better results.

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

The teacher evaluation system under Mayor Bloomberg was limited, prohibitive, and did not include a full range of appropriate metrics for measuring teacher success in the classroom. It is important that we create a holistic and comprehensive evaluation system that does not rely solely on standardized test scores to measure teacher achievement and success.

5) What are your views on campaign funding?

Under the current system, campaign funding favors very wealthy candidates – or at least candidates with very wealthy friends. I believe in public financing of elections modeled on New York City’s campaign finance system: a strong fair elections program with a small donor match. I’ve spent a lot of time in my career working on campaign finance and democracy issues (working for the New York Public Interest Research Group and the Communication Workers of America), and I believe we must fundamentally reform the campaign finance system to reduce the influence of corporate and other special interests, as well as the wealthy.

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

It’s time for New York State to fulfill its constitutional obligation to fully fund education at the levels specified in the Campaign for Fiscal Equality lawsuit. The state has short-funded the city by as much as \$7.7 billion by suspending the terms of the CFE agreement in the wake of the 2009 recession. Unfortunately, the reality is that New York State does not currently have the revenue to provide the full education funding that our children need. However, there is a way to increase revenue: when elected, I will fight to restore higher top marginal tax rates for the very wealthy and eliminate corporate tax loopholes, in order to provide for our children’s future and other vital public services.

7) Raising the charter cap is going to be an important issue in legislature this year. What is your position on this?

At this time, it is important for the City and the State to focus on putting resources into existing schools and school programs, rather than to look toward expanding into new, possibly duplicative services. I am supportive of maintaining the charter cap this year and reevaluating the cap in future years.