



**CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE: Making Baltimore a Better Place for Children & Youth**

This candidate questionnaire is being distributed to all candidates for the offices of Mayor and City Council registered with the Board of Elections for the 2016 Primary Election in Baltimore City. The questionnaire was developed by the Maryland Out of School Time Network 2016 Class of Emerging Leaders. The Emerging Leaders initiative is designed to build the capacity of grassroots youth development organization leaders and engage them as advocates. Read more about the individual Emerging Leaders [HERE](#).

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Submit answers to the following questions by e-mail no later than April 1, 2016 to [emitchell@mdoutofschooltime.org](mailto:emitchell@mdoutofschooltime.org). **Please try to keep each answer to no more than 500 words.** All of the answers we received by 12 midnight on April 1, 2016 will be published in both a print and website version. The complete answers will be release to the press, on social media, and the print version will be distributed at networking event later in April.

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**1. Please articulate your overall vision for how young people will be supported from cradle to career in Baltimore City? What will be the priority strategies within your first four years in implementing this vision?**

My vision is a Baltimore City in which

- training,
- apprenticeships,
- local hiring and purchasing,
- career ladders,
- fulltime living wage jobs within reasonable travel distance from home,
- sound and affordable housing, and,
- the unbiased and universal access to such essentials

enable a tipping-point majority of our long-disenfranchised families to adequately provide for their children and to fully participate as respected stakeholders in the civic discourse on how best to control violence and heal addiction for neighbors and children still languishing on the margins.

In short, the vision is to grow Baltimore through the justice of family self-sufficiency and to rely on newly franchised families and neighbors to help determine, with all of Baltimore, how best to build upon such emerging

strength and experience to include the still forgotten and achieve the still undone

My priorities are to enact a local minimum wage law which achieves \$15/hour by 2020; to help implement local training and hiring opportunities in our schools and communities; to begin educating our children early through universal Pre-K; to move all of our children out of lead poisoned housing; and, to help secure full college tuition or training-to-career support for all BCPS high school graduates *upon graduation*.

Strategies in general are collaboration and persistence.

2. The Mayor and City Council do not currently have oversight authority over Baltimore City Public Schools. **Would you advocate changing the current city/state partnership? What changes would you recommend to the overall administration/approach of public education in Baltimore City?**

The Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) is crucial to the prospects of Baltimore's children and the city's future. Whatever the short-term fiscal and academic gains of the 1997 city/state partnership, they have outlived their usefulness.

The Mayor and City Council are responsible for the wellbeing of our city's children. Since losing the city's direct control of school board appointments and the system's annual budget, city leaders have lost the authority which the city most urgently requires as we seek to navigate the Baltimore community's way back into the center of our children's schooling.

If Baltimore City is to be required to contribute above and beyond the maintenance of effort, we must exercise more BCPS budget authority than the city is now afforded. City government's increased budget authority will then permit more meaningful public and school-based input into how the funds are spent. Legislative initiatives for partially elected school board members are important as well for bringing the school system back home to the local accountability and public interaction so lacking in the current hybrid system.

3. Eighty percent of a young person's life is spent outside of school, yet just 15% of Baltimore's school aged young people have access to afterschool programs. City leaders from around the country have begun to identify the importance of afterschool and summer programs as a critical support and have invested in citywide systems. Participation in out-of-school time opportunities boosts academics, attendances, school promotion and completion and it helps connects young people to caring adults. **If elected, what would your approach be to addressing opportunities for youth beyond the school day and school year?**

I have long championed the urgent need for radically increased city funding of after school, community school, and summer school programs for students of

the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS). We are struggling right now to restore to the city budget for 2016-17 the \$4.2 million the mayor added in 2015-16 at City Council's unanimous request. Ironically, the General Assembly's required local funding for BCPS is being blamed for cuts to this same \$4.2 million. My approach will remain the same as always: to fight for the youth and their opportunities.

As a teacher and a one-time graduate student of education theory, I know that 3-8pm is the time of day when children are most in need of activities to keep them safe and engaged.

I am familiar with all the evidence that disadvantaged children and youth lose academic gains during summer vacation, because they lack positive activities and experiences which keep their minds and spirits engaged.

In particular, I have fought time and time again to save the Waverly and Northwood School Age Child Care Centers (SACCC's) which provide onsite daycare on schooldays and all summer, from 6am-6pm, so that parents have safe and affordable daycare which allows them to support their families without worrying about their children all the time they're at work.

These are the only 2 remaining SACCC's of what was once a citywide system. Most of the support comes from state vouchers and family tuition payments based on a sliding scale by income. The city pays an annual \$167,000 for both SACCC's combined. Yet they are constantly under the threat of being cut out of the budget. (While the budget cutters preach Jobs for Baltimore, they probably go home and complain about those irresponsible working neighbors whose unattended children play ball in the alley. Duh.)

4. In the 70's and 80's Baltimore operated around 130 recreation centers. That decreased by nearly half by the early 90's. Currently, Recreation & Parks operates just 40 recreation centers. There are ongoing questions about the available resources of the Department based on the lack of audits. Some of the recreation centers require major upgrades in both physical plant and programming. While a few new, modern recreation centers and being built, it is clear that many neighborhoods lack quality recreational opportunities. **How would you change the trajectory of Recreation and Parks? How will you address the challenges of programming and physical plants?**

Thanks to BUILD and the active neighborhoods of Darley Park and South Clifton Park, we have the brand new Councilwoman Rita Church Community Center overlooking the swimming pool in Clifton Par and brand new gymnasium wing under construction. We are blessed, and I support the sale of whatever city-owned property is available and expendable to raise the capital funds to build more such regional centers in other parts of the city. Popular theory notwithstanding, however, children and youth are

territorial --- and families want them nearby. So that local activity and gathering places for youth will always be needed, however modest the surroundings. It's the leaders and mentors who matter. So we need to help neighborhoods stake their claims and find the means to stay close to home, a perfect fit for the P.A.L. resurgence!

5. Young people want jobs and they are natural entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, youth unemployment is at an all time high and young people are denied the experiences and skills they need to be prepared to enter the workforce. **If elected, what will be your approach to youth employment and entrepreneurship? How will you partner with Higher Education and Industry?**

I support a year-round YouthWorks program, especially with placements and job-based mentorships which follow the youth throughout their time onsite and beyond the assignment's duration. These are the worksite connections that help our youth network into entry-level jobs after graduation and into college scholarship assistance.

Current wisdom is that, "Not all high school graduates want to go to college." The call is for more trade apprenticeship programs leading to job placements should be widely integrated into school curricula, not just at the pre-eminent vocational schools such as MERVO, Westside, and Carver, but also at general education high schools across the city. The key to success, however, is the market demand for the trades taught and the quality and connections of the apprenticeship programs in terms of ongoing job placements and support by their sponsor organizations.

6. The resilient young people of Baltimore City experience trauma every day. They are both witness to and victims of violence. They have very real reasons to feel stressed and afraid. A growing body of research recognizes the importance of understanding and implementing trauma informed care within schools, community services, social services, and law enforcement. **What approaches will you take, if elected, to implement trauma-informed-care and/or restorative practices in the public sectors?**

I support the expansion of community schools and regard as a major undertaking of community school coordinators the forging of partnerships to establish in-school health suites, prominently including regular mental and emotional health services, with consults to help students and their families work through tragic and traumatic crises; and, diagnoses for specialized referral and local school follow-up of serious mental and emotional health illnesses which imperil so many of our students in these violent times.

7. In 2014, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake, with the support of City Council, established one of the strictest youth curfew laws in the nation and

advocated for year round curfew centers. Proponents of the curfew centers thought they were a good strategy to keep kids safe and to connect young people and their families to services. Opponents feared the curfew enforcement would further strain police community relations and disproportionately target young people of color. Questions remain about the actual utilization of the curfew centers and whether or not the "Youth Connection Centers" serve their intended purpose. **If you are elected, what would your position on Curfew and Curfew Centers be? How would you build more positive interactions between youth and law enforcement?**

I supported the curfew legislation, mainly for the protection of the youngest of our unattended children, who are often on their own outside in the late hours of the night. For the older preteens and teens, the curfew protects against becoming victims, accidental or not, and from drifting into trouble through peer associations. After age-appropriate curfew hours, their safety requires them to be home. If they are not, I expect a Curfew Center to be welcoming, offer services, get them home, and keep them safe.

As for positive interactions between youth and law enforcement, it's a two-way street, but pop-up PAL athletic activities and teams might be good ways to break the ice once officers are trained to coach and to mentor and are given the locations and equipment to do the job right. .

8. The parents and families of young people are often left out of the equation when we are seeking solutions. Family and community engagement requires long term, sustained efforts to build trust and offer authentic opportunities for families to have a voice and feel supported. The Community School strategy has been shown to increase family and community engagement and improve school climate and culture. The city funded community school strategy is currently operating in 50 schools out of 180. **Do you think every school should be a community school? How would you expand the strategy?**

Yes, I believe that every one of our BCPS schools should be funded and staffed as a community school and regularly evaluated by a local school and community advisory board on measures of success as established annually by that board. The expansion strategy should include an annual share of the 3% dedication of general funds to youth activities as proposed by the Charter amendment approved by City Council in March and submitted for voter approval at the Baltimore City General Election of Tuesday, November 8, 2016.

9. The Baltimore City Health Department provides chilling statistics in its [2014 Health Disparities Report](#). Factors of race, gender, economics, and zip code can all be determining factors for a short and painful life, and the trajectories begin even before birth. **Given what we know now about**

**what works, how will you approach making sure every child has the opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult?**

First and foremost, remove and relocate Baltimore's children from lead-poisoned rental properties, beginning with families with children 6 years old and under, the most susceptible to the effects of lead poisoning. Beef up inspections and lead-safe certifications and actively prohibit the rental of uncertified units to families with children 6 and under. Condemn, acquire, and either clear for new construction or renovate to lead-free standards all units in the east/west lead-poisoning hotspots in Baltimore City. Lead poisoning is one issue among hundreds affecting a child's "opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult." It's simply my continuing focus within a zipcode determinism of major crisis proportions.

10. The bright green footprints painted on Baltimore City sidewalks are supposed to denote safe walking passageways for children to get to school. However well intentioned, the reality is that in many neighborhoods there are no safe passageways, and green footprints cut through active drug and gang territory. With schools of choice, some older students are traveling more than 2 hours both morning and evening on unreliable and sometime unsafe public transportation. **What will you do when elected to make sure young people can make it to school everyday safely?**

We can never "make sure," only try our best and pray. A few ideas that would help:

- Implement Councilwoman Rikki Spector's resolution to dedicate a share of speed camera fines to hiring enough crossing guards to cover all dangerous street crossings near schools, including some at high schools, such as at the Poly-Western mid-block crossing of Cold Spring Lane, to and from the Light Rail stop.
- Extend all pedestrian walk signals at school-related intersections to the civilized length of the walk phase for Hopkins students at North Charles and East 33<sup>rd</sup> Streets.
- Recruit relatives and neighbors to walk elementary children to and from school everyday.