

2018 School Board Questions (Written) – Sam Hall

Financial Resources and Budget

1. What are your plans to address the budget deficit in order to fiscally stabilize our schools? What other sources of revenue would you propose instead of relying strictly on the reserves in order to balance the budget?

Solving the budget crisis and getting our public schools back on track through both fiscal responsibility and public-private partnerships is our best solution. Partnering with JAX Chamber and its Beaches Division, small and large businesses and building capital campaigns all to support programming that will focus on workforce development so we're teaching our children skills needed to fill local jobs and keep our kids in Jacksonville with high-paying, 21st century jobs. These programs should focus on preparing kids for all types of jobs and college majors; specifically on finding each child's passions and talents and building on that to help them find the right path for future success.

As chair of the Bridge at the United Way, I managed a large budget and also capital campaigns to ensure we had the resources to help at-risk youth. I have spent much of my time volunteering with many boards in a collaborative fashion, something sorely needed on our current school board, and the last 25 years in Jacksonville mentoring and volunteering on boards focused on our youth.

2. In order to better equip our students to enter the work force, do you support expanding our curriculum to include vocational and/or technical training classes? Why or why not? If you support this, how would you propose to implement and finance this expansion?

I absolutely support this. However, as I mentioned above, we need to help our kids find what they want to do and are passionate about building a career on, and not put kids in boxes, such as: college track, vocational track, write-offs. Every child has the capacity for success. Programs like EVAC have shown us what's possible with at-risk youth and giving them hope by focusing on goals like college and other career paths can change a child's life forever.

This is also a perfect example of how a public-private partnership with small and large businesses could be implemented with internships and apprenticeships where companies need jobs filled and students can graduate ready to fill those jobs. This will cost little money to the district and benefit students, businesses and our city overall

3. Would you support having a forensic audit conducted to better determine how the resources are being allocated? Why or why not?

I posed the question of an internal audit to Dr. Green recently on a local talk radio program. Dr. Green's response was that DCPS is hiring a new internal auditor, and they will be meeting with the Superintendent every six weeks to discuss any issues that may arise/exist. A forensic audit is conducted most often in the event there has been mismanagement or some impropriety is suspected or has been discovered. At this moment in time, I am unaware of any mismanagement or improprieties. At the Beaches Watch Forum I spoke about this at length. As a School Board member, I would follow up with Dr. Green regarding the findings of this new internal auditor. If improprieties or mismanagement is determined, depending upon the severity of these findings, I would support a forensic audit if the findings are material to the extent a forensic audit would be indicated. We MUST have accurate and reliable financial information to base our decision upon, because 1) we must plan ahead and not have \$62 million shortfall that makes it extremely difficult to formulate our 5 and 10 year plans for our district, and to see long term change with better funding for teacher pay, resources for students and infrastructure improvements; 2) we need to determine where money has the potential to be saved by reduction in duplication of services or antiquated technology within DCPS administration, etc.; and 3) DCPS must be able to pass an external audit at any time and be transparent with the taxpayers, parents and students. Working with the community will help the School Board find common ground on budget priorities and long term planning.

Personnel/Safety Issues

1. How do you plan to determine the needs and interests of the individual schools in District 2 and effectively advocate those needs and interests to the Duval County School Board?

I have spoken a lot during our campaign about equity in all DCPS schools. Equity of resources, quality teachers, and meeting infrastructure needs are basic needs. We are blessed to have all A and B schools in District 2, and I will attend PTA and PTSA meetings, meet with principals in the district regularly and have an open door policy for my constituency. I want to hear ideas, challenges and solutions because we can solve problems so much better working together than apart.

Bringing that information gathered back to the School Board and advocating for policies that benefit District 2 schools, and all DCPS schools, and working constructively with my fellow School Board members will ensure I bring effective leadership and problem solving to our District 2 schools and our School Board.

2. What are your plans to make our schools safe without creating a "prison-like" atmosphere?

Our legislature and School Board talks a lot about arming security personnel and I do support the bill passed by the State Legislature and signed by Governor Scott. I also believe that mental health counselors teaching one or two workshops a semester with both students and teachers can go to the root of the problem and help identify kids that may become violent and help teachers

and students identify kids that may become violent. So I believe in a two-prong approach – competent, well trained security personnel at our schools along with increased video surveillance as well as mental health counselors at all our schools to prevent violence before it happens.

3. What changes at the policy level, if any, would you propose to address chronic absenteeism and other discipline-related issues?

Mental health counselors at every school would also greatly help with these issues as well. Chronic absenteeism and discipline-related issues almost always have origins in problems at home, possibly even abusive situations. If we can get to the bottom of why kids are not showing up for school or acting out, we can help them get the services and help they need instead of writing them off by constant suspension or expulsion.

Governance/Communication

1. Describe your plans for improving communications with the State Board of Education and the Duval County delegation.

Frankly, we need to make sure we have a functioning School Board that works well together to work both with the Duval Delegation and the State Board of Education to lobby for resources and lobby against unfunded mandates. Regular meeting with both and creating a “wish list” with fellow School Board members where we prioritize what is most needed and lobby for one or two major issues at a time would be my solution. Strong and regular communication is key as well.

2. How do you propose to keep your constituents informed on a regular basis with regard to pertinent matters related to District 2?

I plan to communicate in a multitude of ways with constituents as people today communicate in so many types of ways. I plan to use email newsletters, social media, my DCPS School Board member webpage and regular attendance at PTA and PTSA meetings just to name a few. I want to ensure parents know exactly what’s going on in their children’s schools and educators as well know way ahead of time if any major changes are going to take place, such as teachers switching schools, as I’ve heard from many teachers say they often don’t find out about until school is about to begin. Keeping everyone in the loop is always ideal.

3. What is your position on maintaining local control over the evaluation and renewal of charter schools?

I support it strongly. Charter schools that receive taxpayer money must be transparent, regulated and overseen closely by our School Board. I am not against Charter schools. I do however think we need to look at studies and student outcomes to determine what Charter schools are doing the best both from a teaching standpoint and financial standpoint; we’ve seen too many Charter schools, both in Jacksonville and around the state, close without warning, leaving parents and students scrambling to get their children in other schools. That is unacceptable.

Stormwater Fees

1. The Duval County School Board recently stopped paying storm water utility fees in all three beach cities, claiming that the fees are actually assessments and that the beach cities have no power to sue for collection because of sovereign immunity. The school properties continue to receive stormwater service despite non-payment for the past several months. Over the years, all three city governments have provided support and materials to the schools within their jurisdictions in the form of crosswalk signage and markings, police supported traffic control and safety plans, landscaping and tree service, post-storm recovery, educational and career support, and other similar services that assist the schools with their daily operations. How would you propose to bring this problem to a solution that can work for all sides and ensure the cooperative relationship between the schools and the beach cities continues to benefit our teachers and children? How does this decision affect the inter-local agreement, if any, with regard to the school board's authority to stop paying stormwater fees?

This is the most interesting question I have received to date and it has several layers to the answer. First, the 3 Beaches Communities have been and continue to be providing stormwater services, police supported traffic control and safety plans, landscaping and tree service, post-storm recovery, crosswalk signage, etc. to assist with the everyday operations of DCPS schools located at the Beach. First I would want to ascertain why DCPS discontinued payment for stormwater services. I have reached out and inquired about this with a current School Board member. They were unaware of this particular situation, and suggested this might be more appropriately addressed at the City Council level between Jacksonville and the 3 Beaches Community City Council members. I have also reached out to one of the Beaches Mayor's regarding this issue. They were similarly unfamiliar with this situation. Obviously more facts are needed to resolve this issue.

Second, I would want to know more about why DCPS chose the doctrine of "sovereign immunity" to discontinue paying for the storm water services. Between the City of Jacksonville and the 3 Beaches Communities, services are being paid to support DCPS operations and the costs for those services need to be borne correctly...meaning if the City of Jacksonville is collecting revenue for providing services for stormwater and police support, but the 3 Beaches Communities are providing the services that are not compensated for in the inter-local agreement, then discussions and negotiations between DCPS, City of Jacksonville, and the 3 Beaches Communities would be needed to identify what represents fair distribution of revenue to match where the costs for the services are being provided.

My approach to solve this problem would be to collect the necessary facts to determine the answer to the questions above and then do my best as a School Board member to resolve the issue and match revenue to the proper place(s) where the expense of services are being provided through the calculation of the inter-local agreement. The bottom line is that the expense for services needs to be matched by appropriate revenue because our common goal is to provide a safe environment for all our children attending DCPS.

