

2018 School Board Questions (Howland)

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?*

DCPS entered the 2017/2018 school year \$23m short of the funding necessary to deliver its budget. It had to tap into reserves and Federal Title I & II funds to make up the shortfall. Some of the reasons for the shortfall were lack of processes to avoid over-expenditures, lack of monitoring of contractual vendor payments, and problems with the district's annual budgeting process. Unfortunately, these kinds of problems snowball. DCPS is now struggling to fill a \$62m shortfall coming into 2018/2019.

From a capital budget standpoint, our resources are even more severely constrained. The average DCPS school is over 58 years old. Maintenance, repair and upkeep by themselves drain the capital budget and leave little room for new investment. This is immediately evident just looking at some of our Beaches elementary schools.

As a School Board member, I will challenge administrators to put in place a culture of efficiency, waste reduction and continuous improvement, much as I have throughout my 20-year business career, in order to stop our reliance on dwindling reserves. I'd ask the Superintendent to prepare a report on student seat capacity levels in our different schools so that we can investigate options to consolidate underutilized schools and divest unused properties to raise additional capital funds. I will ensure that taxpayer funding is spent efficiently and channeled to areas which deliver the highest quality education to our children, such as higher compensation for our top teachers and a wider variety of educational options for our students.

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?*

Duval public schools, which my kids attend, look decidedly different from the public schools my wife and I attended in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to their neighborhood schools, my kids have access to magnet schools, charters, vocational learning and other innovative programs. They can focus on art, leadership, technology, even HVAC, plumbing and carpentry. These are fantastic options that both inspire our children and offer wider varieties of learning.

I am endorsed by the Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA) because it agrees with me that DCPS needs to expand school options, particularly vocational learning. We are in a critical state of demand for highly skilled workers. You see it in county-wide construction delays. You see it in starting bonuses and top starting salaries for truck drivers. These careers can drive high pay and financial stability, yet our vocational programs are not well emphasized or structured.

I have close family in Denmark and have learned a great deal about their educational system. Denmark has sophisticated vocational apprenticeship programs, where kids who do not plan on college start learning practical job skills at age 15 - 16. These programs generally involve

apprenticeships with private companies. This not only serves Denmark with a future highly-skilled workforce, but also ensures professional and financial stability for its next generation.

We could learn lessons from successful systems such as these. We need to broaden our vocational offering and encourage an academic path that will lead to better financial stability for our children. We can pay for these programs by more efficient budgeting and spending, freeing up critical funds to channel to school options proven to drive better student outcomes.

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

Absolutely. In 2011, DCPS engaged an outside consulting firm called Education Resource Strategies (ERS) to do just that – benchmark Duval spending against similar districts and determine more optimal uses of funding resources. This analysis needs to be refreshed.

I have spent 20 years managing defense and marine businesses owned by private equity firms and multinational companies. I have served on 6 local and international corporate boards and have modeled, planned, forecasted, delivered and monitored complicated budgets on an annual basis for over 15 years. Every business or organization needs an independent outside view of its operations and a benchmark comparison to similar entities from time to time. This is a critical way for an organization to determine if it is spending its resources as efficiently as possible.

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?*

FDOE keeps statistics on violent incidents in our schools. In the 2016/2017 school year, DCPS recorded 11,537 violent incidents. With 128,000 students, this means 1 of every 11 DCPS students is a victim. Following the Parkland shooting, DCPS identified 81 schools that require facility security upgrades. This data is available by school and can be tabulated for District 2.

These security lapses are concerning to all DCPS parents, but when considering the rash of school shootings around the country, they are downright terrifying. Unfortunately, there is no single solution. But we do know where we can improve. On a destroyer in the Navy I was part of a large aircraft carrier battlegroup. The battlegroup employed multiple layers of defense to protect against threats - intelligence, radar, patrol submarines, training exercises, etc. Similar concepts apply here. We, too, can provide multiple layers of defense - early detection, enhanced mental health counseling, better intervention parameters, more school resource officers, etc. – to protect our children yet still provide a nurturing learning environment.

I support Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act to increase funding for mental health and school security and Congressman John Rutherford's STOP School Violence Act to improve threat assessment and early intervention. These initiatives will harden our schools and help us fund critical layers of security. If elected I will ensure DCPS effectively directs new funding made available to it by the Florida law, applies for additional grant funding through the

Federal law, and opens new lines of communication with JSO and the Beaches police to deliver the best technology, processes and emergency procedures that will keep our children safe.

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

School infrastructure is just one layer of security. We also need to increase mental health screening resources, improve early identification parameters, and improve first responder response times. In addition, we need to increase our offering of art, music and other educational options for students.

Hardening schools is not just about building bigger walls or frisking everyone who enters a school building. It is about providing educational options that inspire our children and giving our educators to the tools they need to provide a nurturing and engaging learning environment for our kids.

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

The Community Foundation of Jacksonville (CF) looked closely at this issue in 2008. Statistics showed then that the most prevalent early indicator of dropouts was chronic absenteeism. CF determined that school encouragement starts at home and that the dropout process begins before high school. 40% of our dropouts occur in 9th grade.

Little has changed. A cursory review of FDOE grades (<http://www.jaxpef.org/learn/district-performance/school-grades/>) shows that Duval continues to let its middle school students down. That is the main place where we need to direct policy change.

There is a lot we can do if we use data to find the problem and creative solutions to fix it. We can ensure we maintain middle school and high school art, music and physical education options. These topics are proven to better engage and interest kids. We can support the City's after school programs for kids that create alternatives in critical later afternoon hours to drugs, gangs and destructive behavior. We can improve mental health counseling in schools. We can promote programs to encourage parent involvement, such as school orientation, class parent programs and friendly front office staff.

We need to do all we can to reengage 8th and 9th graders before they make the wrong decisions.

Governance/Communication

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

If elected I would regularly meet with members of both organizations, in addition to the Jacksonville and Beaches city councils and various civic groups. One member of the State Board

of Education (Gary Chartrand), the political arm of the Jax Chamber (JAXBIZ), and both local Jacksonville City Councilmen (Aaron Bowman and Bill Gulliford) have endorsed my campaign. So have NEFAR and NEFBA.

Lines of communication with the community – particularly to the Duval delegation – are critical. But the larger governance issue with the School Board is, simply, lack of governance. It has been dysfunctional for years. A recent Jacksonville Civic Council study showed that the School Board met 100 times in 2017. Assuming 4 to 5 hours of prep plus meeting time in each instance, that is about 35 - 40 hours per month. This is excessive for a Board, particularly a functional one responsible not for driving off Superintendents or for running our schools, but for giving clear guidance to the Superintendent hired to runs our schools.

If elected, I will bring years of experience on corporate boards and on the City of Jacksonville's Environmental Protection Board (EPB). At the EPB, I was able to align diverse interests around a common mission to drive effective governance, all within the scope of Florida Sunshine Laws. I will do the same on the School Board. Better relationships with the Superintendent and between Board members themselves will stabilize meetings, foster more transparent and constructive communication, and drive efficiency into decision-making processes.

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

Engaging the community and listening to their diverse concerns has been the primary focus of my campaign. I have hosted roundtable discussions at the Pablo Creek and Beaches Libraries, been interviewed on BuzzTV and on 104.5, attended forums, answered questionnaires (including from individual voters), and knocked on doors in nearly every neighborhood of the district. I am also the only candidate to have reached out to Naval Station Mayport's School Liaison to learn about the concerns and issues facing transitioning Navy families.

If elected, I will similarly engage community members and civic leaders on a regular basis to solicit feedback on timely topics and to develop strategies that could be incorporated into the DCPS plan to improve outcomes for our kids and our community.

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

This is a question about one element of Amendment 8, which is not a school board decision but a measure to be voted on by all registered voters in the November general election.

I have not yet made up my mind on this part of Amendment 8 ... simply because I do not yet know what kind of body the State proposes for a state-wide authorizer. I do know that Florida is one of only 6 states that allows local school districts to authorize and monitor charter schools. The other 44 have a single state authorizer (such as what Amendment 8 proposes) or a combination of local school districts, non-profits and/or universities charged with this task. I also know, from talking with various charter school administrations, that DCPS has not been very hands-on with authorizing or monitoring charter schools. Monitoring happens only twice per year and does not dig far below the surface.

Luckily, I have until November to decide how I will vote on Amendment 8. While I am generally in favor of Home Rule, I am also not opposed to a state authorizer in principle. Indeed, local school districts are often subject to political temperament, not necessarily decisions made on facts and data. And studies have shown that charters perform better in states where authorization is centralized and transparent.

I would like to see what the State is planning should the amendment pass.

One thing I will not do is look at these types of issues through a political lens. I only care about what is best for our kids and our community. If a local school board is using politics to stymie the introduction of schools by a charter system with a proven record of delivering better educational outcomes than underperforming local schools by rejecting a perfectly good charter option, then that school board is not doing with is best for our kids and our community. This is not out of the realm of possibility. It happened earlier this year in Tallahassee.

Stormwater Fees

- 1. The Duval County School Board recently stopped paying stormwater utility fees in all three beach cities, claiming that the fees are 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 a new issue to me that has not been brought up in conversations with Beaches mayors, city councilmen, or thousands of friends and neighbors. So I have not researched it in great detail. However, non-payment of agreed fees by any organization is both disturbing and unacceptable.

The root cause driving the School Board's decision not to pay what it owes is undoubtedly its history of poor financial and governance. See my answers to Financial-1 and Governance-1 above. As a School Board member, I will challenge administrators to put in place a culture of efficiency, waste reduction and continuous improvement, much as I have throughout my 20-year business career. I will ensure that taxpayer funding is spent efficiently, pays the debts it owes and is channeled to areas which deliver the highest quality education to our children. I will also work to bring together the 3 Beaches governments and school board to work through a satisfactory resolution.

Nineteen Jacksonville Council members manage a \$1.2B budget while seven Duval County School Board members control a \$1.7B budget. We need School Board members with stronger financial backgrounds to ensure these things never happen again.