

Callie Kozlak
Ward 1- SBOE Candidate
October 5, 2018

1. Why are you running for this office?

I am running for the Ward 1 seat because our community is one of the most diverse in DC. We have an opportunity to offer all a high-quality education by ensuring our schools are integrated, bilingual, and focused on the kids who need access to the most and best from our public system. I have seen education from many angles, including as a DCPS teacher. I have experienced the enormity of educating children and know parents and educators cannot do it alone. The DC public education system needs to be a network of community-minded institutions and programs working together with teachers, families, and students. We need culturally responsive education practices and policies focused on child wellness and equity embedded at every level of government. I will work to set conditions for access to equity, diversity, and quality for every child in DC.

2. How will you engage your constituents, parents, teachers, students and the community?

Parents: To engage parents and enhance parent voice in policymaking, I will focus on creating safe spaces and building trusting relationships. I will establish community roundtables throughout my Ward during the school year and summer to engage with parents and advocates on the work of the Board, and to hear what they would like the Board to consider. I will reach out to community-based organizations to find areas of synergy for partnerships and programming, including focusing on ways to engage our immigrant communities. I will speak with school staff, the WTU, PTOs, LSAT, to gather their input on parent involvement and strategies for enhancing it in targeted ways to meet schools' needs. I will also look to research and evidence-based best practices and standards for parent involvement. On a District-wide level, I recommend the following policies and practices:

- Establish partnerships with community-based organization staff that speak the same language and may share cultural traditions with student families.
- Ensure reciprocal communication with parents. For example, if a letter goes home informing a parent of their child's pending retention in his/her current grade due to academic performance, the parent should then be notified by phone or text to ensure he/she received the letter and understand what it means.
- Train all educators on cultural proficiency and culturally responsive practices.
- Build parent capacity on how the system works, and how to be watchdogs and advocates for both their child's advancement/opportunity and for equity for all students.
- Offer programs for supporting their child's learning and health outside of the classroom.
- Offer food, childcare, and translation services during parent-school meetings and events.

Teachers: I will leverage existing channels, including the WTU and groups like EmpowerEd, and create new opportunities for collaboration with teachers. I would like to work with teacher to build awareness on how to get involved in policymaking and develop

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collaborative action plans. The “Teach to Lead” model is a resource I would turn to for creating space and structure for teacher leadership.

Students: To effectively serve and empower students, we need hear directly from students. Our schools and standards must foster for all students a love and responsibility for learning and civic engagement. I admire how the Board has two student members along with a student advisory committee. I would also like to spend time visiting classrooms and after school programs to hear from students, and ask for them to weigh in on the policies that impact them.

Other Constituents: DC is a city of many civic-minded professionals native to DC, and coming from many places to make a difference in the world. I would like to harness that energy and get young professionals, people whom no longer have school-aged children, or singles and couples without children more engaged with our DC schools. *You pay taxes, you have the right to vote, you ought to engage!* I would look to engage these groups starting by teaming up with ANCs, local businesses, and community-based organizations or initiatives to try and bridge connections to events happening with the schools, and build awareness and capacity for more engagement in policymaking, or volunteerism with students.

3. What qualifications do you bring to the office of State Board of Education, including your professional or personal experience with public education in our city?

I am a former DC public school teacher. I taught at Parkview/Bruce Monroe ES (Ward 1), Seaton ES (Ward 6), and at Community Academy Public Charter School (Ward 5). I have dedicated my career and life's passion to providing high-quality education opportunities for all students, especially the most vulnerable and underserved. For the past 15 years, I have worked to advance educational equity, including working on the type of state and federal policy and funding programs that fall under the responsibility of the Board. I have been a DC resident since 2005, and have dedicated my personal time to volunteering with a number of Ward 1 organizations, including Young Playwrights' Theater (Vice Chair of the Board of Directors), FLOC, the Playtime Project, and the Northwest Center – all providing important services to kids and their families outside of the school day. My professional experience includes:

Field Campaign Manager for Education Policy at UnidosUS (formally National Council of La Raza); Leadership for Educational Equity Fellow, Office of the Secretary, US Department of Education (Obama Administration); Director of Public Policy and Funding, Citizen Schools; DC public school teacher; Educational Opportunities Project Associate, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; and Legal Aid Immigration Paralegal and Outreach Coordinator with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. I have a Masters in Early Childhood Education from George Mason University, and I am a Spanish speaker.

4. Under Mayoral Control of education, in effect since 2007, the State Board

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of Education has very limited authority over policy. Do you believe their authority should be expanded? **[Yes]**

I believe balance of power is important for democratic institutions, and would like to see the Board have more decision-making power. Through my policy and advocacy work in other states, I have worked with state boards that have more power to shape policies and regulate on laws. This creates checks on power and responsibilities for education spread among a Governor's office, SEAs, and state legislature—and gives advocates more arenas and opportunities to inform and shape policy.

Nonetheless, as a State Board member, I will focus on the powers that exist within the current statute, as well as the opportunity that exists to use the platform of the State Board to bring community voices into the policymaking process and empower stakeholders with information to make change. I do not want to spend my four years focused on what is not – but instead, immediately use the power I have to focus on opportunities for kids and bringing solutions to the table.

I will prioritize building relationships and gathering input from OSSE, community members, local education organizations, DCPS, DPCSB, DME, and the City Council. The District's governance bodies are important stakeholders for the SBOE, as they intersect with constituents, appropriate funding, manage budgets, and ultimately impact the policies and decisions of the Board. One of the values of Mayoral control is to streamline partnerships and resources of agencies that intersect with schools and education, such as health.

5. Should charter schools be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the open meetings laws for boards of directors? **[Yes]**

Charters have become an embedded part of the public school landscape and educate 50% of our kids. Charters are using tax dollars to provide a public service. We must hold them accountable to the same rigorous standards for performance, transparency, and oversight as traditional public schools.

6. In 2016 the State Board of Education made important recommendations for how schools in the District of Columbia should be judged as succeeding or not, consistent with the Federal ESSA (Every Child Succeeds Act). They included putting in place a star rating for each school - 1 to 5 stars. Do you believe the metrics proposed for that rating system capture school quality? **[No]**

To advance equity, it is important to have one, transparent accountability system for comparing all schools and resource distribution across the District. I support, however, putting more weight on indicators for the growth and academic proficiency of subgroups, including at-risk students, English learners, and students with disabilities. It is important to give schools and educators

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more credit and support for serving and making sustainable gains with high-need students and historically disadvantaged subgroups who need access to our best schools and educational and social service interventions.

I do not believe, however, that the current metrics alone can capture the essence and inherent qualities of a school community. The star rating system is one informational tool, but parents should be encouraged to look at multiple aspects, including meeting with the school principal and teachers; asking about school pedagogy and theory of action; going to parent meetings, and observing the diversity of voices; visiting classrooms to see how students are engaging in instruction; looking at the amenities, partnerships, and expanded learning opportunities a school offers; looking its specialized services and models for special education and ESL; and discerning whether the school is a good fit for their child/ren. The District should commission or recommend community-based organizations equipped to help immigrant families and low-income families engage in this process as needed.

7. Last year, DCPS was embroiled in a series of scandals around graduation rates, leading to calls for an independent research entity to provide better analysis of how our schools are doing. Do you agree that such an entity, outside of the control of the Mayor, is needed? **[Yes]**

Data transparency is a good thing, and I support an independent research entity positioned to take a more comprehensive look at school quality.

As a floor for looking at school quality, however, this entity ought to align or mirror federal and local data reporting requirements, so that we don't have bifurcated indicators and reporting systems that could be confusing for the public and distort the utility of our state-wide accountability system to surface equity gaps.

8. The State Board of Education voted on and approved the use in DC of the PARCC test to satisfy federal testing requirements under ESSA. Only 3 states and DC are now committed to using PARCC. Some states have advocated de-emphasizing standardized testing as the measure of success in education. How do you view the role of standardized testing in DC schools?

I believe it is essential to have statewide standards and measures for all of our students in DC. This is something the civil rights community has fought for over decades. Under current statute, maintaining statewide standards and assessments is a purpose/function of OSSE and the State Board, and can help with directing resources, targeting support, and ensuring equity. I do believe standardized tests should be less high-stakes and more diagnostic for the purpose of identifying equity gaps and evaluating root causes.

The purpose of standardized testing is to measure critical academic skills – and use that data to

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empower students, teachers, and families to map out appropriate interventions and supports and advance progress. Standardized tests tied to standards and standards-based curriculum helps with creating consistency in data collection across all student groups and schools within a state. High-quality, useful, well-constructed assessments can be part of a positive and meaningful learning experience for students, and help both the students and teachers excel at their work.

As a Board member, I will want to look at what supports are in place to ensure the results of high-quality assessments are transparent and timely, and families and educators best utilize that data. It is also important to consider whether assessments are culturally responsive, and what can be done to support ALL students regarding assessments and test preparation.

The State Board and OSSE, along with the other DC education governing bodies, have a responsibility to set the most productive conditions possible for teachers to hone their practice around the standards in a creative and flexible way, and ensure our students have the supports they need to master the standards and comfortably take assessments to measure their mastery.

9. Almost half DC students now attend public charter, not neighborhood, schools in the District of Columbia. We have over 200 publicly funded schools and 66 separate school systems (65 charter school systems and DCPS). Up to 20 new charter schools can open each year. Should the Council and/or Mayor have the authority to limit the expansion of charter schools? **[Yes]**

I believe charters should be a purposeful part of the greater system when they can prove to offer nuanced and specialized services, as well as positive and effective learning environments for students and teachers. Charters should NOT be a means for profiting investors, or creating unhealthy competition among neighborhood schools and spreading resources too thin.

10. Should the Council and/or Mayor have authority over charter school siting (where they are located)? **[Yes]**

Yes, to due to complexity of charter siting and overlapping issues of zoning and funding, for example, the process ought to be streamlined across agencies that fall under the Council and Mayor's responsibilities and oversight.

The Charter Board ought to continue to oversee details of applications and accreditations of charter schools under District and federal laws, and establish high standards, methods for due diligence and strict scrutiny, and incentives for serving at risk students in relation to the decision of school siting.

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Overall, I think a comprehensive plan is necessary and we should preference locations based on the charter's ability to effectively serve at-risk kids, and to serve as a magnet with specialized programming that will foster diversity.

11. The following issues are of great concern in our city. Which of these issues do you think is most important and why?

- Funding equity
- School diversity/ integration
- Giving disadvantaged student subgroups priority access to schools if they serve less than the district average
- Expanding the number and support for educators of color

There is an immediate need to focus on equity, and to focus on the kids who need the most and best from our public schools. Giving disadvantaged student subgroups priority access to schools if they serve less than the district average is a good place to start. This will allow kids to receive a high-quality education regardless of their zip code, and help integrate our schools by race and class.

12. The DC State Board of Education had a representative on the Mayor's Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force. Earlier this year, the task force put forward draft recommendations related to improving outcomes for at-risk students and creating a framework for coordinating planning decisions between DCPS and charter schools. Which recommendation do you think is the most important and why?

The list of recommendations from the Mayor's Cross-Sector Collaboration is solid one. In terms of setting a district-wide vision, and getting at some of the root causes around inequity, I think "creating a diversity plan for the city with ways to measure progress", is the most important. If we invest in diversity, we can also invest in equity and quality for all of our schools. Ensuring we are meeting the unique needs of our low-income and historically disadvantaged groups, while also adopting policies and investing in targeted strategies, such as dual language and bilingual programming, will make all of our schools rich with learning opportunities and popular hubs for families.

13. How should the SBOE hold the Office of the State Superintendent of Education accountable?

The SBOE should a) build good, trusting relationships with OSSE staff, b) understand OSSE legal responsibilities and restrictions, c) identify synergies around policy priorities, and d) use its platform and community engagement mechanisms to bring productive ideas and concerns to OSSE.

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Overall, as elected official on the SBOE, I will be responsible to my constituents' needs and interests while advancing a platform of equity, diversity, and quality in the best interest of kids. I will also take responsibility for doing due diligence and scrutinizing policy proposals and options before making a decision.