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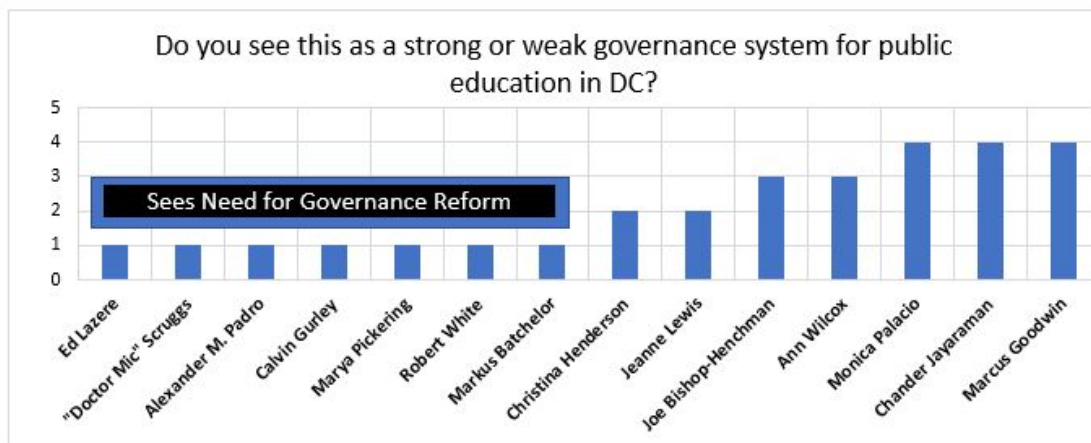
## At-Large DC Council Candidates Differ on Public Education Governance and Charters

Washington, D.C.: Fourteen of the 24 at-large D.C. Council candidates responded to the [Coalition for DC Public Schools \(C4DC\)](#) questionnaire on public education. They provided thoughtful answers about their background and vision for public education in D.C.

*"There are clear differences between candidates responding to the questionnaires. What distinguished them most were their answers on governance and charter school growth without citywide planning." - Suzanne Wells, Ward 6*

### DC Public Education Governance System

Since 2007, when major governance changes were made in public education, DC Public Schools (DCPS) and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education have been under the full authority of the Mayor. The Mayor has complete policy making authority for DCPS - the city's single largest school system - and there is no policy-making board for DCPS. The elected State Board of Education has limited authority over state education policy. The Mayor appoints the members of the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) with approval by the Council. Neither the Mayor nor DC Council has authority over PCSB decisions. The DC Council is responsible for budget and oversight of DCPS and the Public Charter School Board but not over charter operators or schools. Each charter school operates as a unique system and is essentially an autonomous entity.



Seven candidates ranked DC's public education governance system as weak, and suggest public education governance reform. The seven other candidates were more ambivalent, ranking the governance system a 2-4.

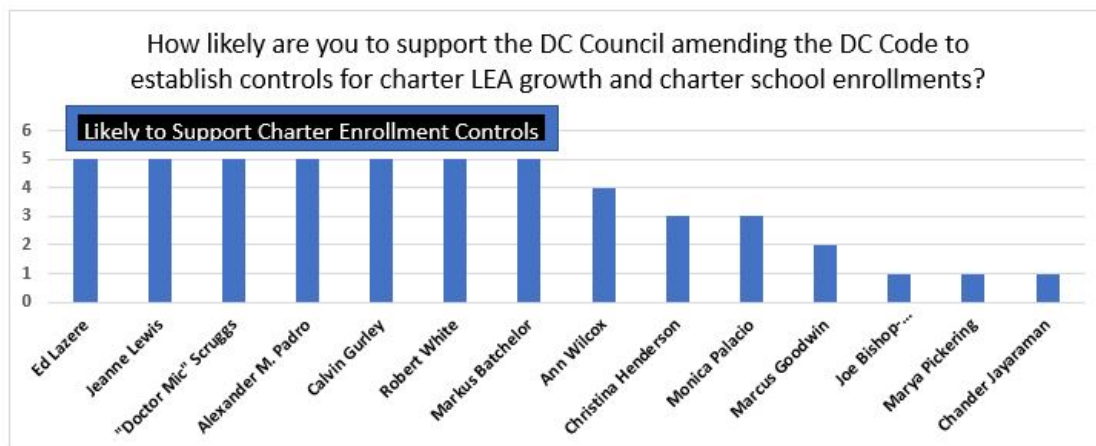
*"It is notable that no candidate indicated that DC has a strong public education governance system." - Becky Reina, Ward 1*

### Regulating Charter Growth

The other question which differentiates the candidates is about regulating charter growth. In 1995, Congress passed the DC School Reform Act that established the independent Public Charter School Board which has the authority to open up to 10 public charter schools a year and unilaterally permit an expansion of enrollment at existing charter school sites.

The District of Columbia has over 200 publicly funded PK-adult schools for 95,236 students and 68 or 69 separate school systems (four or five of which are new schools opening 20/21). Total charter school enrollment is most recently estimated at 43,795 students and while DCPS school enrolling 51,441 students). In fiscal year 2021, elementary and secondary public education for DCPS and charters represented 18.3% of the District's annual operating budget and 22.3% of the District's capital budget.

When candidates were asked whether they supported amending DC code to enable the Council to control charter enrollment growth, again seven candidates strongly supported this-in six cases they were the same candidate who supported governance reform. It is also notable here that, even in this area, two other candidates were ambivalent and four candidates indicated they were unlikely to support amending the DC code to control charter growth.



Public education is one of the District's most critical responsibilities. The American Community Survey population estimated there were 18.2% or 128,168 children 0-17 years-old in the District of Columbia in July 2019 of the estimated total population of about 705,000. The DCPS and charter school enrollment of children, youth and adults in 2020-21 was about 95,000 pre-pandemic.

Under Mayoral control, The Council is the independent body able to ensure transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency in public education given the limited power of the SBOE.

*"It seems clear that some of these at-large DC Council candidates support the status quo, even as the opportunity gap and inequities of the current system persist. Other candidates are prepared to work to improve the fundamental structure of our public education system and challenge the governance system and charter growth which has advantaged charter school operators to a greater extent than it advantages neighborhoods, children and families." - Nzinga Tull, Ward 7*

C4DC encourages all voters to review the long answers of candidates to [learn more](#).

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[Communities for DC Public Schools \(C4DC\)](#) is a coalition of groups and organizations committed to these principles:

- **Ensure all families have access to high-quality DCPS schools in their neighborhoods** - a predictable, matter-of-right path from preschool through high school.
- **Focus resources** on students and communities with the greatest need.
- **Require coordinated planning** between the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) to build a core system of stable DCPS neighborhood schools with a complementary set of alternative options.
- **Responsibly manage our financial resources.**
- **Broaden assessment measures** to focus on student growth and use multiple measures to assess a quality education.
- **Ensure families and community members have reliable ways to exercise the right to participate** in public education decision making.

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