

Vote411 Voters' Mini-Guide

Fall 2021

Pittsburgh Public School Director Districts 1, 3, 5, 7, 9

This Voters' Mini-Guide is an excerpt of the online Vote411 Voters' Guide -- a project of the League of Women Voters. To see your entire ballot, visit Vote411.org.

The Pittsburgh School District is divided into 9 districts for board representation. Seats in the odd-numbered districts are up for election in 2021. To determine your district, view a map of PPS districts [here](#), or enter your address at vote411.org to view the candidates on your ballot.

Pittsburgh Public School Directors are elected on behalf of the community to oversee the education of students in their jurisdiction. They serve as agents of the state legislature. They are responsible for curriculum and instruction management, all finances including development of annual budgets and levying of taxes and issuance of debt obligations when necessary; personnel; legal matters; management of facilities; and transportation of students as appropriate. Schools may include pre-K and career and technical schools. The school board consists of nine members who serve four-year terms of office without pay.

Term of office: 4 years

*All information in Vote411 Voters' Guides is submitted by the candidates and has not been edited or altered in any way. **The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh** has made every effort to enlist the participation of each candidate running for these positions. Candidates who would like to submit or update their written answers should contact vote411@lwvpgh.org.*



Pittsburgh School District Director District 1

District 1 Candidates (choose 1 of 1):



Sylvia C. Wilson

Party: Dem, Rep

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: d1@sylviacwilson.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://sylviacwilson.com>

Facebook: Re-Elect Sylvia C. Wilson@D1for2021

Twitter: @SylviaCWilson

District: 1

Education: Pittsburgh Public Schools - Peabody Carnegie Mellon University - BA University of Pittsburgh – Med

Qualifications for office: Retired teacher with Pittsburgh Public Schools; in second term on school board; participates in on-going professional development for school directors;

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: Students must be met at their level initially to determine what they know and build upon that based on grade level and curriculum. Then attention has to be given to enhance and enrich their educational experiences. More time alone doesn't do it, it's the types of activities provided and materials used (and with interest) and the educational rigor used which will bring about the desired results.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: Anti-bullying policies have existed in Pittsburgh Public schools for quite some time. It is important that the policies be applied and adhered to consistently across the district. Incidents and/or complaints and resulting actions must be viewed to see that district policies are being followed. If not, then those schools not compliant must be given additional training and oversight.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: Public schools educate all children - they do not get to choose which children they will teach. Charters were to be innovative, to become infused into the district. They have not shown the way. Charter and cyber schools should adhere to the same guidelines as regular comprehensive public schools. Public schools must disclose their finances and budget. There is no requirement to publicly show the use of tax dollars by charters and cyber schools. Charter schools and cyber schools have boards, but they are not elected. They are using public dollars, this should be publicly disclosed as well. Quite a few charters and cyber schools are run by profit making companies. Again, they should not be allowed to make a profit using tax dollars.

Pittsburgh School District Director District 3

District 3 Candidates (choose 1 of 1):

Sala Udin

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Questions:

This candidate has not responded.

Q: The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?

A: - no response -

Q: Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?

A: - no response -

Q: Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.

A: - no response -

Pittsburgh School District Director District 5

District 5 Candidates (choose 1 of 2):



Tracey Reed

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: tracey4district5@gmail.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://tracey4pps.com>

Facebook: Tracey4PPS

Education: B.A. Secondary Education, English (University of Pittsburgh)
M.A. Public Administration (University of Virginia) Ph.D. Education Policy
Studies (University of Virginia)

Qualifications for office: I was a high school English teacher. I have a Ph.D. in Education Policy. I have spent 13 years in PPS with my two children.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: Formative assessments should be used to help educators understand where students are academically and with which concepts they are struggling. These assessments should be low stakes and casual and can come in the form of a quiz or even a conversation. The results should guide educators' practice to address students' individual and collective academic needs. Addressing learning loss will require cooperative effort between educators, communities, families, and students. In addition to learning loss, it is imperative that we also focus on students' and educators' social and emotional needs as they return to school.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: I would determine the effectiveness of anti-bullying efforts by taking stock of changes in students' attitudes about how best to treat one another. I would also pay attention to the number of reported bullying incidents. Interestingly, sometimes if anti-bullying programs are effective, the reported incidents may increase as students' understanding that bullying is inappropriate rises and they become empowered to report bullying. A focus on anti-bullying to address racial and social justice issues seems short-sighted. Many racial and social justice issues are systemic and do not show up as interpersonal conflict between students.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: I am in favor of impactful, high-quality schools for all children in our district. All schools should be held to high standards and be accountable for student outcomes. Seventy percent of Pittsburgh families choose a school other than their feeder school for their children. White families choose primarily private and magnet schools, and Black families mainly choose district, magnet, and charter schools. The families of the 5,000, mostly Black children who attend charter schools, live in our district, pay taxes, and deserve to send their children to schools that work for them. Our district has historically under-served low-income and Black children. It is imperative that families have options about which they can feel confident.

District 5 Candidates (choose 1 of 2):



Terry Kennedy

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: FriendsOfTerryKennedy@gmail.com

Campaign Web Site:

<http://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTerryKennedy>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTerryKennedy>

District: Pittsburgh Public Schools, District 5

Education: 1983 Carnegie-Mellon University B.S. in Applied Mathematics, Computer Science track

Qualifications for office: 20+ years PPS volunteer involvement in early intervention, special & gifted education, magnet programs, assistive technology, & CITY Connections. Board member since 2013; 2nd VP 3 times; chair/co-chair of Policy, Business/Finance, Safety & Operations, Negotiations, & Personnel committees.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: The District is continuously assessing student achievement using multiple measures. The summer BOOST program is a start to remedy learning loss and will be offered to the students most at risk for learning loss. Planning for other supports and programs is in process. Assessment of each student's needs should occur early in the 21-22 school year to determine the appropriate supports needed to help each student to overcome the loss.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: I am a firm believer in restorative justice. I believe it needs to be used as the primary method to address all issues, and to help the affected students and staff to move beyond the incident(s) that prompted the use of restorative justice. Discipline data will be used to measure the effectiveness. A reduction in disciplinary actions is the expected positive outcome.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: Parents/guardians have a right to select the best option for their children. The following reforms are needed due to the old & unfair charter school law that harms public school students. I believe funding formulas need to be fair. The rules that govern expenditures of the public schools must be equally applied to charter schools. I also believe the tuition charge to a district for a student with an IEP attending a charter school must reflect the cost of implementing the IEP. I propose a flat tuition rate charged for each student, regardless of a student's school district, with the IEP implementation cost added for each student with an IEP. Money not used by a charter school to educate a student should be returned to the school district.

Pittsburgh School District Director District 7

District 7 Candidates (choose 1 of 1):



Jamie Piotrowski

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: jamiespiotrowski@gmail.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://www.jamieforschoolboard.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Jamie4SchoolBoard>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/JamiePio_Pgh

Education: Waynesburg University Bachelor of Arts Sociology-Family Studies University of Pittsburgh Master of Social Work University of Pittsburgh Master of International Development

Qualifications for office: Jamie is a licensed social worker in Pennsylvania and has dedicated her career to working directly with vulnerable communities helping them fight for and access valuable resources. Endorsed by State Rep Jessica Benham, Senator Wayne Fontana, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, among others.

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: Covid-19 disproportionately impacts our Black and brown students. While students learn from home out of necessity or by choice, we must close the digital gap and ensure students have the appropriate equipment to access their classrooms and resources; as the return to in-person learning occurs, vulnerable students should be prioritized, with appropriate safety protocols in place to keep them safe from possible infection. I will advocate for a holistic learning model for our students and strengthen additional opportunities for social-emotional, and academic growth in our community schools and Summer programs.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: It is important that our teachers and staff are trained to recognize the signs of bullying, students have access to support services and opportunities for student-adult communication, and that we utilize an inclusive curriculum that reflects our student body and creates a learning environment of respect. We must utilize evidence based and data informed intervention materials and programs and utilize input from leading advocacy groups. These methods must also be adapted for online learning and social media usage to protect our students from bullying and harassment while online, outside of regular school hours.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: We should focus on targeted and intentional improvements and advocate for charter reform at the state level to ensure all of our students, regardless of their learning path, have access to a high-quality, education. The state's tuition rates for cyber and special education need to be reevaluated to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent equitably and effectively. Charter schools are not held to the same standards as traditional public schools and there are not mechanisms in place to hold them accountable to communities. Charter school law must be reformed to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer dollars.

Pittsburgh School District Director District 9

District 9 Candidates (choose 1 of 2):



Gene Walker

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: genewalkerfordistrict9@gmail.com

Campaign Web Site: <http://genewalkerfordistrict9.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GeneWalkerforDistrict9>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/GeneWalker4PPS>

Education: PPS Grad- Peabody High School Bachelors of Science - Bloomsburg University

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: I believe the Superintendent and his staff must create a comprehensive plan to help students catch up on what was lost over the last year. The instruction over the last 12-18 weeks has been much improved, but it is not enough. There should be efforts to partner with afterschool and summer youth programs to integrate some learning opportunities with curriculum provided by the district that targets the students most in need. The district already has a summer school format, but I would like to see them expand their reach by going to where the students are and providing the much-needed personal instruction that is need.

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: Social and racial justice continue to be an area where school districts must improve. There are initiatives that begin to address the problem such as the K-2 suspension ban and the implementation of restorative justice practices. I would look to measure the effectiveness of these and other programs by looking at the comparative data, looking at the rate of suspensions or disciplinary referrals, taking a specific look at the race, ethnic, and gender spreads for each area. Success will show reductions in all areas and a narrowing gap across the board. The district must have a comprehensive and detailed plan with trackable metrics for any plan that is introduced.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: I fully support a parent's right and ability to find the best possible education for their child. As families leave the district in pursuit of better schools, we must look internally at how we can improve the schools within PPS. We must increase academic opportunities, address racial disparities in achievement and discipline, and increase our investment in neighborhood schools in order to bring families back to the district. In the meantime we also need to advocate for state legislation that will reform the funding formula for charter schools, especially cyber schools, to create a more equitable distribution of public tax dollars and reduce the financial strain on our district.

District 9 Candidates (choose 1 of 2):



Veronica M. Edwards

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

Campaign Email: Edwardsfordistrict9@gmail.com

Facebook: Veronica Edwards

Twitter: N/A

District: vedwards1@pghschools.org

Education: Leadership Pittsburgh XX Carlow University Gladstone High School

Qualifications for office: Currently the incumbent in District 9 First African American to Serve Led the charge to return students safely back to school during a pandemic Hosted a Community Vaccination Clinic Delivered Covid 19 Essentials to Crafton Heights and Mountain View Communities

Questions:

Q: *The pandemic has highlighted the significant disparity in educational delivery in districts from no in-person learning, to hybrid models to full time in-person sessions resulting in uneven student performance. As schools reopen, how would you propose to assess student achievement and to remedy the loss of learning for so many students?*

A: Because we are responding to COVID-19, there are no concrete answers. The District has to use all of our resources to reach students. Public assessments and private assessments to determine where students presently stand. Educational resources to pull them up. Dedicated teachers to perform assessments and District staff to give students what they need to grow, live and learn to build quality lives. It will take teamwork to make the dream work. Let's go!

Q: *Social and racial justice issues have become a concern for all school districts, many of which have instituted anti-bullying programs to help address these issues. What kinds of criteria would you propose to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and progress toward improvement?*

A: I believe anti-bullying is a bandaid. We need to address anti-racism. The minds and emotions built up in people for decades is no longer accepted by today's young people. America and our Cities are dealing with young people who refuse to be held down because of the color of their skin. They want to be educated to their fullest extent to lead quality lives. Let's deal with the real problems of today.

Q: *Pennsylvania currently allows parents to choose whether their children attend public schools, charter, or cyber-charter schools with funding provided by state and local opponents of all of these options. Where do you stand and explain your position.*

A: I stand on providing students opportunities to educate and grow their lives. Parents are a child's first teacher. Whatever they do and see what's best for them is alright with me!