
WEJA School Committee Policy Questionnaire

The Worcester Education Justice Alliance (WEJA) is a group of students, parents, teachers, school staff, and community members standing together to fight for education justice in Worcester. We are a chapter of the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance (MEJA) and a member of the Fund Our Future coalition advocating for policy at the state level to fully fund public schools.

<http://worcesteredjustice.org/>

<https://massedjustice.org/>

Please answer each question by selecting either yes or no. You may use the comments section to explain your reasoning for your selection below each question.

Name *

Jack Foley

Questions related to curriculum

1) Would you vote in favor of a comprehensive age appropriate sexual education curriculum as was advocated by the Worcester Impact of Sexual Health (WISH) taskforce (<https://www.wishtaskforce.org/sexual-education/recommended-curricula/>) like the Making Proud Choices? (<https://www.etr.org/ebi/programs/making-proud-choices/>)

Yes

No

1) Explanation of response (optional)

We need to look at a comprehensive, inclusive curriculum for sexual and health education. The professionals support this approach and the students are desperately seeking accurate, complete information. If desired, parents can opt their children from these sessions.

2) Would you advocate for the elimination of the MCAS as a high school exit exam?

Yes

No

2) Explanation of response (optional)

MCAS scores alone should not be the sole determinant for graduation. Although I am not a great supporter of MCAS, having accountability with exams such as MCAS holds districts responsible for educating all children (for example, students with disabilities). I would prefer a portfolio approach that includes other indicators in addition to MCAS

3) Would you advocate for the elimination of high stakes standardized tests, like the MCAS, to evaluate school performance?

Yes

No

3) Explanation of response (optional)

There are many factors that contribute to lower test scores, but it is no coincidence that the districts with the lowest rankings also have large concentrations of poverty and English language learners. It is unfair to stigmatize school districts, teachers, and students with this singular evaluation by MCAS scores.

4) Do you believe that teachers should be required to follow the state curriculum frameworks to ensure that all students are learning the same curriculum across the state (as opposed to giving school sites and teachers more flexibility to teach the topics and content that they believe most important)?

Yes

No

4) Explanation of response (optional)

I support a framework for the state's educators to follow, but I would like to see more flexibility for teachers to incorporate different lessons into their curriculum. We have seen some of this with teachers who are using the frameworks but including new, varied materials and content. I do worry that without frameworks, there may be districts that do not cover sufficient coursework.

Questions Related to Funding

5) Do you support the Promise Act and would you advocate for its passage with the state legislature?

Yes

No

5) Explanation of response (optional)

Worcester needs and deserves more funding to reach an adequate level of funding. The proposed new funding will make a significant difference for our students.

6) State spending requirements enable local communities to spend more than the minimum required by the Chapter 70 Foundation formula. Since most local communities do spend more than required to address the educational needs of their students, on average, local communities spend over 25% above their required allocation. Worcester typically funds right at the minimum required by the Chapter 70 Foundation formula (give or take roughly 1%). If you were elected to school committee would you advocate for the city to spend 10% or more above the required foundation formula even if that means the city would have to secure additional revenue?

Yes

No

6) Explanation of response (optional)

As a member of the school committee, it is our responsibility to advocate for more funding for education. At the same time, I also understand that the city has financial constraints with needs in many areas. The city has committed significant resources in debt service for the construction of new school buildings. The new state funding will require more funds from the city. I will state that City Manager Augustus understands the importance of funding for public education and has been willing to stretch the funding.

7) Facing fiscal shortfalls as a result of the Great Recession, in 2010, the City of Worcester became one of the few municipalities in the state that began taking a 3% indirect of the state and federal grants that pass through City Hall. This amounts to over a million dollars that is designed to cover the costs of developing and administering the grants (which in Worcester are all handled by the school department). Would you, if elected to the school committee, advocate for City of Worcester to continue to take this 3% indirect?

Yes

No

7) Explanation of response (optional)

This was an inappropriate move to take more funding from the schools without any legitimate justification. We fought this move for many years with the city and included the state in these discussions and rulings. City Manager Augustus has reduced these indirect cost recoveries from 3% to a lower rate, but not completely back to 1%. The city is already taking a "credit" for the administrative support of city offices, thus there is no need to "double dip" with these indirect charges.

Questions related to Staffing and Leadership

8) Would you support merit pay or bonuses for teachers who are considered highly effective in producing strong education outcomes (based on measured test score improvements) for students?

Yes

No

8) Explanation of response (optional)

I do support merit pay or bonuses for teachers who may be called "master teachers" and who can provide leadership and mentorship for other teachers. I would not want to tie bonuses to achievements on standardized tests since it may discourage teachers from working in the most challenging school environments.

9) Would you support hiring bonuses or stipends for certified bilingual teachers in our Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

9) Explanation of response (optional)

We know that in a competitive hiring environment with high demand and lower supply, WPS may be faced with incentives to encourage the best teachers to consider Worcester. With new state funding, it may be possible to include some minimal financial incentives to hire strong teachers, especially in the important areas of ELL.

10) Do you support utilizing 'diversity bonuses' in order to recruit more teachers of color in Worcester?

Yes

No

10) Explanation of response (optional)

Same response as above. We need to aggressively pursue a more diverse work force.

11) Do you support 'Grow Your Own' programs that recruit teacher candidates from non-traditional populations (e.g., high school students, paraprofessionals, and after-school program staff) who are more likely to reflect local diversity and more likely to continue to teach in their communities?

Yes

No

11) Explanation of response (optional)

I think tha we need to take a new look at what we are currently doing, as the numbers of students to teachers do not seem to be significant. (I think that the numbers are better with paraprofessionals becoming teachers, but still not great.) Much easier to hire locally from our existing residents.

12) Do you support the hiring of the Associate Superintendent for Diversity and Inclusion?

Yes

No

12) Explanation of response (optional)

I am glad that we hired Yvonne Perez to the new position, but the job description is more for a recruitment and retention specialist in Human Resources versus a chief diversity officer. There is a significant amount of professional development needed throughout the district for social and emotional learning, implicit bias, cultural differences, and effective inclusion. I am hopeful that Ms. Perez can begin to implement these trainings, but a commitment to diversity and inclusion requires the full support of the institution.

Questions related to student discipline and student life

13) Would you advocate for secondary schools to begin later in the morning to allow adolescents to sleep later?

Yes

No

13) Explanation of response (optional)

Taken by itself, this question would be a yes. We need to understand the impacts upon other students, such as having the elementary students starting much too early. The only option would be to start elementary schools much later than 8:30 or spend much more on bus transportation.

14) Do you support the continuation of the current WPS policy that bans “hats, bandanas, scarves or sweatbands,” as well as “outerwear” and “droopy pants.” See the full dress code in the 2019 handbook.

(<https://worcesterschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018-19-English-with-updated-links.pdf>)

Yes

No

14) Explanation of response (optional)

I do support most of the requirements in the dress code, but this needs to be amended to allow for headware that reflects cultural traditions and appearance.

15) Would you support a moratorium on suspensions and expulsions that are not directly associated with violence or drugs or issues of direct safety for the educational communities?

Yes

No

15) Explanation of response (optional)

We must understand better what these violations are, the rationale behind them, and alternatives to suspensions. Without knowing exactly the types of violations involved, I would not be prepared to call for an immediate moratorium. We do need to get at these issues quickly and make proper adjustments to our policies.

16) Would you support a ban on all suspensions in grades pre-K through 3rd grade?

Yes

No

16) Explanation of response (optional)

Like many, I am stunned by the large number of suspensions for students K-3. We need to find alternative solutions to these suspensions, such as in school supports and counseling, perhaps with the proposed new state funding. We also need to dig deeper into these numbers and understand the violations and the pressure being placed on the teachers and the schools. As with our other data, there is much more to be learned with this issue, but I do not feel that a complete ban is the answer at this time.

17) Do you support continuing to hire and station police officers in schools?

Yes

No

17) Explanation of response (optional)

The presence of the right police officer in the schools can contribute to the security in the school and be another adult with whom students can connect. Many of the previous concerns about safety have been reduced, so it is a worthwhile conversation whether these services need to be continued next year, but I am not yet of the opinion that the presence of officers should be discontinued.

18) Do you support the creation of restorative justice programs in the schools?

Yes

No

18) Explanation of response (optional)

The limited presence of these programs in WPS was very successful and we need to put the responsibility to resolve these conflicts with the students. It is the right way to develop long-term, sustainable solutions to violence ad harassment.

19) Would you support an amendment to the Community Based Juvenile Justice Program

(<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter12/section32>) that would require the notification of parents by the school district of all youth in the Worcester Public Schools who are identified by the district attorney's office as a juvenile "most likely to pose a threat to their community?"

Yes

No

19) Explanation of response (optional)

Questions related to school choice

20) Do you support the creation of additional innovation schools in Worcester?

Yes

No

20) Explanation of response (optional)

I support the concept of giving teachers, principals, students, and parents greater autonomy in developing the mission for their schools and gaining a greater sense of ownership for the success of all students.

21) Are you in favor of supporting the creation of additional charter schools in Worcester?

Yes

No

21) Explanation of response (optional)

22) Are you in favor of supporting vouchers for low-income students to be able to attend schools of choice, including public schools, charter schools or private schools?

Yes

No

22) Explanation of response (optional)

Questions related to community voice and accountability

23) Will you demand that the Worcester Public Schools ensure that school site councils are established and active in every single school in order to develop the school improvement/accountability plan, develop site specific goals and review the school site budget as stipulated by state and federal law? (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/schoolcouncils/>)

Yes

No

23) Explanation of response (optional)

24) Will you ensure that parents (and students in high schools) are part of the hiring committee for faculty and administration?

Yes

No

24) Explanation of response (optional)

25) Will you make sure that all data that the school district collects and all research that is completed by outside researchers in the Worcester Public Schools is made available to the public?

Yes

No

25) Explanation of response (optional)

26) Would you vote in favor of allowing 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in local elections?

Yes

No

26) Explanation of response (optional)

27) Would you support the creation of an online (and phoned) anonymous bias incident reporting and investigating process for incidents that occur in the Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

27) Explanation of response (optional)

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