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## 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 \*

John Monfredo

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### 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)

Yes, as long as it is developmental and age appropriate and one that will encourage parents not to opt out of the program.

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

Yes

No

### 2) Explanation of response (optional)

Only if there is an accountability formula to evaluate the growth of the students' progress.

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### 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 is more to educational assessment than high stake testing for it does not tell the entire story of the students' progress and the district meeting the needs of students . I believe that it is unfair to many students for it causes anxiety for many, leads to students dropping out of school and sometimes gets some teachers to teach to the test. Doing that does not produce the type of gains in independent learning that is needed. It lacks the creativity needed to engage the students in meaningful learning.

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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)

The state curriculum is flexible enough for the teachers to be creative and use primary resources and additional material to engage the students in the subject matter of the curriculum.

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## 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)

YES, YES AND YES! The new bill is called the "Student Opportunity Act" ... The Student Opportunity Act bill modeled after the MTA Promise Act and passed by the State Senate by a 39 to 0 vote is one more opportunity for the state to get it right. This bill will fulfill the recommendations stated in the 2015 foundation budget review commission report for it addresses the needs of our most underserved students in the Gateway cities. It is the most significant update to the funding formula since it was established in 1993.

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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)

It's easy to say yes but is it possible? Gateway cities such as Worcester have many expenses and needs. We must continue to work with the City Manager and be realistic on what the City can afford to pay for our schools. I would advocate for the city to give the schools 5% above the minimum requirement of the Foundation formula.

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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)

I have spoken on the floor at City Hall about this and advocated for the City to reduce the percentage. They have lowered the percentage to 2% but I'd like to see it reduced to 1%. We also need a better financial agreement with Medicaid funds. Here's how it works! The Worcester Public Schools collects \$3.2 million from the federal government for providing certain medical and occupational and physical therapy services to Medicaid eligible students. These are services that are required to be provided to the students as part of their school day. Because of an antiquated state law, none of these funds actually goes back to the Worcester Public Schools but the funds are placed in the city's general fund to be used as part of the city's budget. On the other hand the city has continued to support the schools with new school construction.

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### 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)

First of all this a collective bargaining issue and would need to be brought to the table to see if there is anyone interested. In addition, I have not heard of any merit pay program that has been successful. The idea of merit pay goes all the way to England around 1710. Teachers salaries were based on their students' test scores on exams in reading, writing and math. According to the research the teachers and administrators became obsessed with financial rewards and punishments that led to curriculums being narrowed to include only the testable basics. Also, the good will and cooperation between teachers will certainly be compromised. I believe that the a plan would take away from our real goal which is to focus on the students and in giving them the best possible education.

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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 need to hire the best and brightest teachers in all areas of the curriculum and be fair to all new hires.

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

Yes

No

10) Explanation of response (optional)

Again, we need to go out and hire the best and brightest teachers of color. I have proposed that we expand our "Worcester Future Teachers Program" for "Grow your own teachers" can start from within for its time to build a workforce. We need additional staff who reflect the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student population so lets encourage students in our system to consider teaching as a profession. Let's have our newly appointed Chief Diversity officer lead the way on the recruiting process and recruit our best and brightest students to consider teaching as a career.

We have a great program in place, a partnership with WSU, and students who want to be teachers will have the opportunity to receive scholarship money to attend and if they are successful and get certified they will be hired by the Worcester Public Schools. Another bonus for the district is that these students are Worcester residents.

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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)

In addition to my answer on question 10 the district has embarked on training paraprofessionals in our system and allowing them to take college courses and be certified as teachers. Thus, we are doing both ... high school recruiting and giving our paraprofessionals an opportunity to become teachers

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

Yes

No

## 12) Explanation of response (optional)

We have hired a Chief Diversity Officer and we do have a Deputy Superintendent in place. We are one school system and all of us need to work as a team.

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## 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)

Sleep deprivation among teens has become a major public health issue across the nation for research has shown that not enough sleep puts teens physical and physiological health at risk. According to studies lack of adequate sleep can result in memory impairment, poor academic performance and decision making, moodiness and aggression, anxiety, and even more car accidents.

So based on all the research in the past twenty years why aren't more districts not changing their starting time? It's the same reasons that were articulated at the standing committee meetings in our city ... disruption in child care, for in many cases older children care for younger children when they get out of school or even before school, the challenge of coordinating interscholastic activities and sports with other districts, students with after school jobs and the biggest reason is the financial aspect of what it would cost in transportation. Many of the high schools start their day at 7:20 a.m. Thus, in an attempt to save money on transportation can all the times within our district be moved up 30 minutes? It's something to think about and explore?

Once again we as a community need to make healthy policy decisions for all students. Is it possible that these problems can be worked out? We know the benefits from the research but at the moment we are stuck in neutral. Let's look at the obstacles and see if they can be solved. I'd like to see administration come up with some alternatives or at best start a pilot program at one high school and see how it works. Let's examine our options and not just sweep the item under the rug or do what we have done for the last fourteen years – ignore the problem.

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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)

Yes, dress codes are necessary for in the world of work one does have to follow a dress code. The School Committee, for the most part, follows the lead of the principals. A dress code improves students behavior, reduces peer sexual harassment, prepares students for the work world and are worth the trouble that it takes to enforce it. While teens will always find a way to express themselves, imposing boundaries can prevent them from resorting to extremes that can sometimes lead to undesirable consequences. Dress codes are a way to teach students the importance of a respectable appearance which is a lesson that can positively impact their self - respect and self - esteem.

As chair of the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues the policy on dress comes to my committee. We listen to what students, parents and educators have to say and make a decision and then it goes to the full committee for a vote.

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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)

Perhaps but a full discussion would need to take place and there has to be a plan of action. As a Principal I was never a fan of suspensions unless the action of the student affected the well being of other students or posed a threat to others. However, there are rules to follow and there are consequences for their actions. Those consequences need to be outlined for it may be having the student stay after hours, have a parent come in and take the student home for the day or it could be having the student continue with his/studies in a time out room. Again, the resources would have to be there and a good plan needs to be in place. Is it worth discussing, yes I believe so!

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

Yes

No

16) Explanation of response (optional)

Again, perhaps unless the student is out of control and if that is the case the child will need to go home for the day. We need to have an action plan for those types of behaviors and we would need the necessary resources to meet the social and emotional needs of the child. This is where additional wrap around coordinators and counseling services need to be available.

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

Yes

No

17) Explanation of response (optional)

The correct title is school resource officer and they are responsible for working with the school principal, district's safety director and staff on developing a safety plan to ensure schools are safe places for students to learn. In addition, many of the officers act as mentors to students, create partnerships and build relationships with the students. Many times students will just want someone to talk to about problems that they are experiencing and the officer can act as another caring adult to the student. Also, parents may seek information from the SRO for advise if their child is experimenting with drugs or alcohol.

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

Yes

No

18) Explanation of response (optional)

Some of our high schools have had such a program. I believe that restorative justice empowers students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups. However, schools need to be trained in this approach for the idea is to bring students together in peer-mediated small groups to talk, ask questions and air their grievances. According to research districts have seen a drastic reduction in suspensions and expulsions and students have stated that they feel safe.

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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)

All information should be confidential and if a student is a danger to the community he would be placed in a special program.

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## Questions related to school choice

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

Yes

No

20) Explanation of response (optional)

We do have innovation schools in Worcester and I served on a committee that reviewed the schools applications. However, the needed funding should be part of the schools movement to create the innovation model.

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

Yes

No

21) Explanation of response (optional)

It's healthy to have competition but the current Massachusetts charter school law is siphoning public money from the schools at a time when we can ill afford to give up any dollars. I want our the Worcester Public Schools to be the school of choice for parents.

The current law is unfair and it hurts all of our children in Worcester. Currently we are paying over 20m\$ out of our budget for charter schools.

Also, according to a study years ago by WPI charter schools benefit financially from avoiding Sped students and those students who were English language Learners.

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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)

Parents can request any school of their choice to attend in Worcester and if the space is available they are granted permission. In addition, we do have a school choice policy for students can go to other public schools outside of the district.

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### 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)

All schools need an active site council for we need parents to be engaged in their child's learning. Everyone needs to remember that a parent is a child's first and most influential teacher and we need to have parents as part of the learning process.

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### 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)

They can be on a committee but by law the Superintendent does the hiring.

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### 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)

We do get that information for it is presented by the Superintendent at the School Committee level.

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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)

They need to be involved in learning more about the process of voting and know what is involved in a local election. Also, the maturity factor is important. I would like to see straw polls taking place first so that the students will learn more about the election process.

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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)

We do have one for bullying prevention...

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