

# 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 advocate for more educationally just policies at the state and local level.

<http://worcesteredjustice.org/>

<https://massedjustice.org/>

These questions were created to address potential and important policy issues that future school committee members may have to vote on. Therefore, just as with how you would have to vote on these types of policy issues, we ask you to share how you would vote on these issues. Please answer each question by selecting either yes or no. But we also invite you, if you so desire, to explain the reasons for your yes or no "vote" so that you may address the complexities of the issues.

Please complete this questionnaire by Sunday, October 10th at 5:00 pm. We will be reviewing and compiling your responses and sharing via our email and with the media in the weeks that follow leading up to the election.

Please provide your full name. \*

Tracy O'Connell Novick

## Questions related to curriculum

1) Do you approve of the Worcester School Committee's vote in May 2021 to implement the comprehensive sex education curriculum, “Rights, Respect, Responsibility,” for Worcester Public Schools.

(<https://newbostonpost.com/2021/05/06/comprehensive-sex-education-curriculum-approved-by-worcester-school-committee/>)

Yes

No

## 1) Explanation of response (optional)

Worcester is well overdue to have a comprehensive, citywide curriculum. For too long, the access students had to health education was entirely dependent on whom they have had as a teacher (some of whom are excellent, some of whom are not). Ensuring your students receive this education can literally save their life, as I said twenty years ago as an English teacher. Bringing down the teen pregnancy rates, bringing down the rates of STDs, providing resources for students who may face sexual assault, lowering the chances of our students committing sexual assault, and providing the supportive environment our LGBTQIA students deserve are all consequences I am looking forward to seeing from this decision.

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2) Would you advocate to the State Legislature for the elimination of the 10th grade MCAS as a graduation requirement for high school students in Massachusetts?

Yes

No

## 2) Explanation of response (optional)

...because it isn't that simple.

Our state ESEA plan includes tenth grade MCAS as part of the plan.

That is what ensures we have access to our federal Title grants.

Changing the state portion of this doesn't solve the larger equation of the federal law, which was advocated for by civil rights organizations (yes, really). This is a complicated question.

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3) Would you advocate to the State Legislature for the elimination of high stakes standardized tests, like the MCAS, to evaluate school performance (and put in place alternative ways to evaluate schools and educator performance)?

Yes

No

### 3) Explanation of response (optional)

I first think it's important to note that educators aren't evaluated by student performance; that was explicitly dropped several years ago. I'd be interested in a conversation that really looks at what we want schools to do, and then discusses how to evaluate that.

I don't, quite honestly, see that discussion happening much of anywhere right now. I see a lot of shouting.

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4) Would you work to allocate District resources away from some standardized curriculum and software purchases to provide more autonomy for schools and teachers to decide what learning tools and materials they want to include in their classrooms?

Yes

No

#### 4) Explanation of response (optional)

This question is way too broad to answer a single way. On one hand, I made the motion that moved the money away from further early literacy PD that doesn't touch the classroom (as teachers weren't attending) on a program that I find of questionable utility. On the other hand, we have a very high rate of mobility, and I do think that having the same set of resources used across the district is very very helpful with students who we know are going to be switching schools.

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5) Would you support legislation that bans the teaching of "Critical Race Theory" in schools? (see for example: <https://districtadministration.com/critical-race-theory-tracker-banned-schools-education/>)

Yes

No

### 5) Explanation of response (optional)

This is such a ridiculous non issue. CRT isn't taught in K-12 schools. This is one example of how some communities are reacting to changes in demographics that threaten the sense of security some have.

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6) Would you support an initiative that mandates professional development in universal design for all teachers (mainstream and special education teachers) who work with students with a special education plan? (see, for example: <https://universaldesign.org/definition>)

Yes

No

### 6) Explanation of response (optional)

I'd want to talk to special education parents and teachers about it before deciding.

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## Questions Related to Funding

7) Would you advocate to the State Legislature for the passage of the proposed "fair share amendment" to our state constitution, which would create a new tax on millionaires to fund public education?

Yes

No

7) Explanation of response (optional)

...and in fact, already have for years.

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8) State spending requirements enable local communities to spend more than the minimum required by the Chapter 70 Foundation formula. Most local communities do spend more than required to address the educational needs of their students; on average, local communities spend 25% or more 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

### 8) Explanation of response (optional)

While it hasn't been 10%, I've been doing this for as long as I have been involved in advocacy in Worcester, too.

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9) Do you support the calls from members in the community that the funds the city previously provided to support School Resource Officers be re-allocated to other programs in the Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

9) Explanation of response (optional)

...though note that this would mean the city would need to move the funding to the WPS bottom line.

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Questions related to Staffing and Leadership

10) 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

10) Explanation of response (optional)

This has been shown multiple times to be ineffective. It's also not a great idea, anyway.

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11) Would you support signing bonuses or additional pay stipends for certified bilingual teachers to attract more bilingual/bicultural teachers to our Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

11) Explanation of response (optional)

Maybe. They're needed and valuable, but I'm not thrilled about signing bonuses as a model.

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12) Do you support utilizing 'diversity bonuses' or other similar intentional recruitment strategies in order to recruit more teachers of color to Worcester? (For example, see section 6 [bottom of page two] of this Minnesota Bill: <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/7ec78b3d-0ac8-42ca-99ee-3ef9f63fcb36.pdf>)

Yes

No

12) Explanation of response (optional)

Again, mabye

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13) Do you support the expansion (i.e. funding, outreach, inclusion of bilingual teachers) of ‘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? For more info see:

<https://ednote.ecs.org/grow-your-own-programs-for-teachers-a-look-at-programs-and-policies/> and <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter15a/Section19>

Yes

No

13) Explanation of response (optional)

Yes, BUT successful ones. Worcester Future Teachers doesn't get us teachers.

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14) Do you support the expansion of the role of Worcester Public Schools Chief Diversity officer to extend beyond human resources and DEI regulations/compliance to include addressing inequities in other areas of schooling (i.e. school discipline, academic outcomes, profession development, etc)? (See the former job description:

<https://worcesterschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Diversity-Officer-job-description.pdf>

Yes

No

14) Explanation of response (optional)

Yes, and I've been holding the job description for another position under the CDO to make this very point. We don't need more folks under HR for this. We need the position moved.

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Questions related to student discipline and student life

15) Would you advocate for secondary schools to begin later in the morning to allow adolescents to sleep later? (see the attached literature review of 38 articles related to the topic: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4824552/>)

Yes

No

15) Explanation of response (optional)

...and have been. This research is in my subcommittee, which I plan to have meet again before the end of the year to look at input from students on their after school hours to better inform what I hope will be a positive recommendation out to the rest of the committee.

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16) 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

16) Explanation of response (optional)

...and have.  
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17) Would you support a ban on all suspensions in grades pre-K through 3rd grade?

Yes

No

### 17 Explanation of response (optional)

...and have. My motion was voted down in subcommittee due to the superintendent's opposition.

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18) Do you support the City's decision to end the placement of School Resource Officers (SROs) in Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

### 18) Explanation of response (optional)

I have asked for this for years.

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19) Do you support the creation of restorative justice programs in the schools? (see this guide from Vermont: [https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-integrated-educational-frameworks-whole-school-restorative-approach-resource-guide\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-integrated-educational-frameworks-whole-school-restorative-approach-resource-guide_0_0.pdf))

Yes

No

19) Explanation of response (optional)

Yes, though I'd say "expansion" as we have some.

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20) Would you support an audit to examine the relationship between the Worcester Police Department and the Worcester Public Schools?

Yes

No

20) Explanation of response (optional)

'though I am concerned as to if we'd get real information at this point.

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Questions related to school choice

21) Do you support the creation of additional innovation schools in Worcester that "can implement creative and inventive strategies, increase student achievement, and reduce achievement gaps while keeping school funding within districts?"

(<https://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/>)

Yes

No

21) Explanation of response (optional)

I will say that I don't think we spend the time examining what we're doing with the ones we have, though.

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22) Are you in favor of expanding the number of charter schools in Worcester? (<https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/>)

Yes

No

22) Explanation of response (optional)

Luckily, the one filed for this year has not been moved forward.  
I've been active every time we have had one filed.  
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23) Would you support the creation of new exam school where the admission to the school would be determined by the score on a standardized exam?

(<https://www.telegram.com/article/20120425/NEWS/104259906>)

Yes

No

23) Explanation of response (optional)

I chaired the Mayor's Ad-Hoc Committee that recommended against that. I wrote the report, which you can read here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ry29ycn4w3jfb45/Exam%20IB%20report.pdf?dl=0>

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24) Do you believe that Worcester Technical High School should continue to consider grades, test scores, conduct, and attendance records in its process for admissions?

(<https://worcesterschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WTHS-Emergency-Admissions-Policy-2021-2022-12.21.2020.pdf>)

Yes

No

24) Explanation of response (optional)

On my motion, we're getting a report as to what a lottery admission would look like instead.

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Questions related to community voice and accountability



25) Will you ensure that Worcester public schools establish active site councils 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

25) Explanation of response (optional)

...that are demographically representative. Add that to your ask :)  
I have continued to push for this. I'd suggest that this is one that the superintendent really needs to hold the principals accountable on. But that would need to be a superintendent priority for that to happen.

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

Yes

No

26) Explanation of response (optional)

The issue is that this requires an exception to the MGL giving principals hiring authority. We have this at the innovation schools, and some principals do it voluntarily, but it is difficult to require unless it is a culture change.

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27) Will you work to 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 when it is legally acceptable to do so?

Yes

No

27) Explanation of response (optional)

...and have been doing so.  
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28) Would you vote in favor of allowing 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in local elections (as they do in Hyattville, and Greenbelt, Maryland and in Berkeley and Oakland, California)? (<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/why-we-should-lower-voting-age>)

Yes

No

28) Explanation of response (optional)

And I believe Amherst has a local control measure before the state on this.

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

Yes

No

29) Explanation of response (optional)

To go to whom, is my question here. I understand the why. I'd be concerned about process.

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