

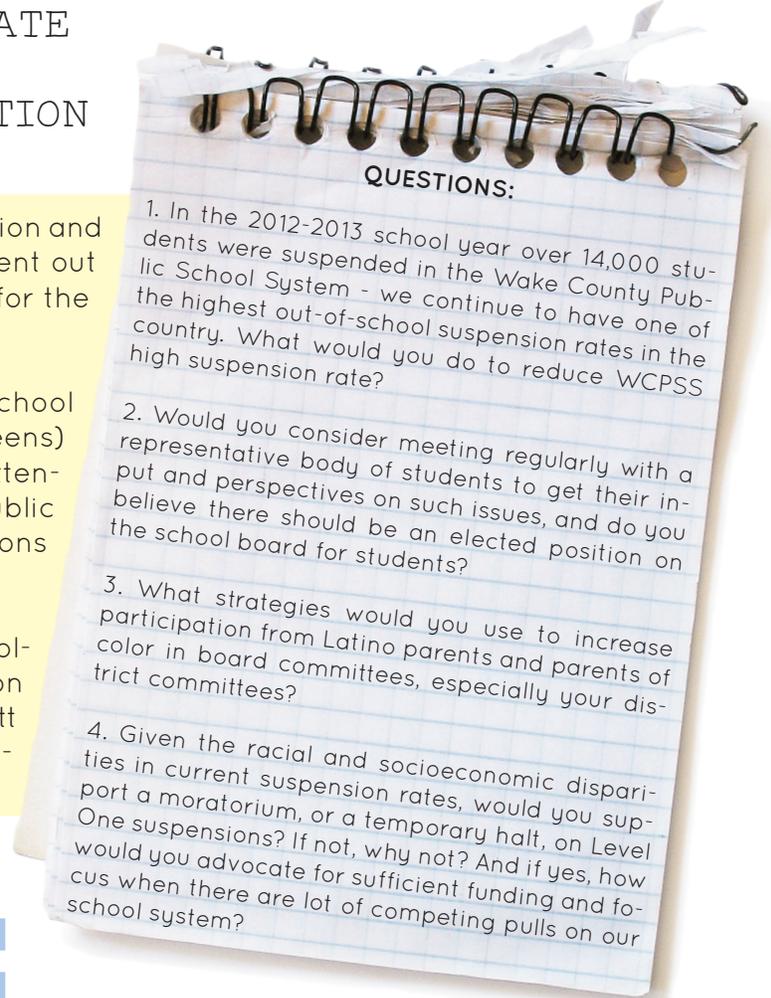
# NCHEAT WANTS TO KNOW

## WAKE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE RESPONSES TO A QUESTIONNAIRE ON DISCIPLINE AND YOUTH REPRESENTATION

To inform the community and increase voter education and civic engagement, the Youth Organizing Institute sent out a questionnaire to be answered by the candidates for the upcoming Wake County School Board elections.

As part of the National Week of Action Against School Push-out, YOI, NC HEAT (Heroes Emerging Among Teens) and the Education Justice Alliance are bringing attention to the high suspension rates in Wake County public schools and calling for a moratorium on suspensions for Level One offenses.

The following 4 questions were asked of all 8 school-board questions. 4 replied with their responses. Don McIntyre, Zora Felton, Deborah Prickett, and Matt Scruggs did not respond to NCHEAT's questionnaire.



### MONIKA JOHNSON-HOSTLER



2. For the past three years we've been trying to give voice to students who are interested in civic engagement and activism across all spectrums. We're going to engage students, we're going to sit down with students. We have to have your voices at the table. One

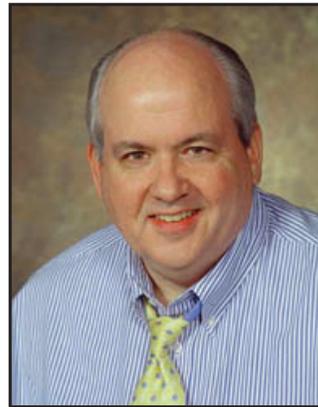
of the things that I've learned writing public policy is the best policy has the voices of the people it impacts and that's you, that's students. You being here shows us that you're ready that you have the questions and the information.

3. I'm invested in all parents and students having a voice. That can mean getting on committees. As a school board member, I want to be clear that this will not be the last time that we have a conversation. Although I'm clearly saying that all parents, especially parents of color should be involved, we also have to be clear that there are different ways to be involved. Sometimes it's very small things and sometimes large things. I believe that we have to be representative of the community that we serve because people have to see that their voice is heard.

4. I would support a moratorium. I've looked at the research. What we know is those programs cost a lot of money. So I think the moratorium, will be an opportunity to tell the school board to sit down with people who have been digging into this and help them figure out how to move Wake County forward. I think unfortunately what you're going to get, is that people are go-

ing to be very afraid of the word moratorium, so I like that you're calling it a pause, because you're giving people an opportunity to be on any side. We need to sit down and discuss what's happening in our state. Those graduation rates, we know, have a correlation with our suspension rates. We also know that's a correlation to student achievement. And I think all of us, that put children first, can't argue with that.

### BILL FLETCHER



1. Students need to be in the classroom to learn, and if they're not in the classroom for safety reasons then we need to have a supplemental education strategy that helps them make better choices so they can be in the classroom, but not lose their instruction while there out and in school suspension. There is a problem with our data at the school district. If a student is sitting in the office office for lack of compliance or cussing at a teacher and that escalates into another offense it shows up as that minor offense in the suspension data. You also indicated that 14,000 students have been suspended. I don't think that's correct. It could be that there were 14,000 incident in which a student was suspended so that a dramatically lower number of actual students. And frankly I don't

## BILL FLETCHER CONTINUED...

know which is which at the moment. But I think the RTI is going to help that out and better in school support for education and choice making is going to be there.

**2.** The challenge in what you've asked is that meeting with students that's identified by someone with an agenda is that, that is not a broad based understanding of students across the county. In the past superintendents have had student advisory councils. We've had different way to involve students in participating. I'm very open in finding ways to do that in a way that's inclusive, not exclusive.

And we get better by hearing things we don't want to hear and many times folks might chose to avoid a meeting like that because they don't wanna hear what they don't wanna hear. But I think it's important that we listen whether it's students or parents, those voices, so that we can be more effective policy makers. So yes.

**3.** There's no policy that says that students of color should be suspended more often . So it winds up being , the people that implement the policy and the people that asses the needs of the children. and that's where we need to look. We need to look at the classroom teachers, the principles of the folks that are providing the intervention before we get to suspension. So folks say what's happening, what are we seeing, how can we change the environment so this student can be productively engaged in school and doesn't wind up being a suspension issue. if a child misbehaves, regardless of their color... if there's a safety issue regardless of their color or disability, we've got at least 25 other kids in that classroom who deserve a positive environment. So let's be real with ourselves. The color of one's skin does not cause the behavioral issue, but it might affect an administrator's approach to the problem and we need to make sure that we deal with that in an effective way.

**4.** I would not support a moratorium. We can make changes to the system, but I would not support a moratorium.

## NANCY CAGGIA



to learn, but we also need to balance that with the safety of all the children. So we need to look at why they're being suspended and if it's again these different levels. We also have positive behavior support that we use in the elementary schools and again if we use that when they're younger, we won't have problems later on.

**2.** Thank you for being so engaged. Right now there's a law called a school improvement team. Where three parents are allowed to be on the school improvement team where they look at the data from each school and identify with the administration what they'd like to see happen. See if you can't get on that school improvement team, at your local school. That might be a way for you to get your voice heard at a local level. Also, I've been on many committee's where we've had student members, where they are looking for student input so, I would say try to. As a board member we're constantly looking for that. Looking for people who want their voices to be heard... If you have such an agenda there is a way for your voice to be heard. I've already seen ways that it works.

**3.** I really appreciate all you people coming here and talking but I think we are getting some redundancy of questions here and

again we have a lot of children's need and a lot of educational items that I would encourage other people to come up and ask some questions, but I appreciate your coming and I think it's a great way for student's voices to be heard. I think I'd just start repeating myself.

**4.** Would I support a moratorium on out of school suspensions? No, I think we need to balance the safety of the children in the school. and out of school suspensions .. and understand the reasons why. Am I understanding your question? I think we can't just stop something.

## TOM BENTON



**1.** That figure is frightening. The bad thing about suspensions is that when you send a kid home, they never come back better than when they left. They're losing out on learning. As a principal I had to ask myself, what do we do when a student acts like a child and we don't have alternatives? When a teacher sent a student to me, my only options were talking to the student or sending them home. And I had to make that judgment call. Was their behavior to the point that I had to give up three days of education or was I going to send the student back to the classroom where they were probably going to be a disruptive influence. We've got to figure out how to help our students and parents master the forms of social skills you need in a formal school setting and the bottom line is that we have to have constructive alternatives and creative alternatives. We're now funding counselors at 1 per 750 kids. The national recommendation is 1 to 250. We've got to find ways to have adults who can counsel students. As I principal I noticed that a lot of times students were acting out because they were behind in their academics. The other thing we have to do is help students understand what is typical but inappropriate behavior.

**2.** As much as I'd like to stand here and tell you that I'd like to have an elected position on the school board for students, I'm not sure if I'm ready to go that far. We used to have a body where representatives for each high school met with the superintendent once a month and I think this might be a key time to go back to that.

**3.** We've always tried to include those parents, but our efforts have not been successful. So, we've got to make sure that we not only have someone that speaks different languages but understands the culture of people in our schools. The question of how to get them more involved in our committees is a question that we need to ask about all of our parents. We need to make sure that we have representation from our diverse population.

**4.** No, I wouldn't support a moratorium. Level One offenses are like misdemeanors in the law. We are working increasingly with principals to think of more creative ways to deal with Level One offenses, but until we can provide the resources to do that, we can't just have a moratorium. Once again, we have to have an alternative. Some of the things you talked about aren't going to happen right now. With Level One offenses, you don't see that there has been a series of Level one offenses, a series of conferences, a series of plans put in place. In the data, all you see is that this skipping got the kid suspended.

FOR INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED WITH THE YOUTH ORGANIZING INSTITUTE, EDUCATION JUSTICE ALLIANCE OR NCHEAT, PLEASE VISIT [WWW.EMPOWERYOUTHNC.COM](http://WWW.EMPOWERYOUTHNC.COM) OR [WWW.EJA-NC.COM](http://WWW.EJA-NC.COM).