

# COMMISSION ON DISABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORCESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE CANDIDATES

RESPONSES PUBLISHED OCTOBER 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019

*All candidates were asked to participate in the questionnaire.  
Candidates' responses are listed below under each question.*

## SECTION I: STRATEGIC INCLUSION

As an advisory board to city government the Commission on Disability monitors the City's progress regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan. The Commission on Disability encourages public awareness that disability rights are civil rights.

### 1. AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) COMPLIANCE

➤ Do you oppose or support a public review of the district's compliance with the ADA?

✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O'Connell Novick; John Trobaugh

✓ Oppose (none)

➤ If elected, what specific actions, will you take to demonstrate progress the school district made with adapting old buildings according to the Americans with Disabilities Act? What is your commitment to pushing for full compliance? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond the 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

### RESPONSES:

"I would introduce an item for a full audit of ADA compliance across our school and administrative buildings. Once that audit is completed I would request a report with regular updates for coming into compliance and work with the district to create a timely plan to achieve this, and create ongoing monitoring mechanisms." (Cara Berg Powers)

"High-quality instruction in the general education environment is the first and most critical element of ensuring that students with disabilities achieve at high levels, but many students with disabilities also need high-quality and highly individualized special education and related services, such as visual impairment teachers and audiologists. To address the challenge of developing and sustaining quality special education programs, states and districts across the country have developed structures—frequently referred to generically as education service centers or education services agencies—to pool expertise; share potentially high costs from low-incidence disabilities; target resources; and assist districts in educating students with a wide range of disabilities. Given the costs and documented shortages of qualified specialists, these structures can be critical to ensuring that districts can reliably access specialized personnel to provide their

students with key services. For instance, Massachusetts districts partner to form special education collaboratives to aggregate resources, pool risk, and develop technical expertise that would be nearly impossible for individual districts—much less schools—to develop. Such partnerships allow schools, especially in small districts, to plan and budget for potentially variable costs and develop and sustain the capacity required to provide a full continuum of quality services and placements to students with a diverse array of disabilities.” (Chantel Bethea)

“I have as a school committee member taken into consideration safety features that would provide accessibility under a safe atmosphere and environment in our old buildings. I have and will continue as a school committee member to advocate for the facilities department under Worcester public schools to ensure WPS has not only installed ramps but the appropriate lighting necessary. In consideration of our new buildings and our proposed structures elevators are included in the plans proposed. I have also as a school committee member advocated that the older buildings that do have elevators are inspected and if repairs are necessary they are completed and in working condition.” (Diana Biancheria)

“I know that some of our school buildings fall short of being ADA compliant. I will work with city officials to obtain funding to ensure we are making sure that everyone has full access to our buildings.” (Laura Clancey)

“I support an annual assessment of the barriers to access that exist in the public school buildings. A plan for moving towards full compliance needs to be created and understood by the community. I recognize that given the age of many of the buildings, full access will be a challenge in some of those structures. We must find ways to make significant access available and look at longer term strategies for capital investments for full accessibility.” (Jack Foley)

“I support working together with the Disabilities Commission in order to review the district’s compliance with the ADA.” (Molly McCullough)

“I support the concept of our buildings being up to code. However, we must be sure that we have the necessary funding to move forward but if the students are in an unsafe area or it is a health issue to the students’ immediate action needs to take place. In addition, I would ask that we contact the Massachusetts Building Authority and ask them to consider funding any and all renovations.” (John Monfredo)

“In May 2018, the Worcester School Committee received the results of a comprehensive review of the Worcester Public Schools’ facilities. After a discussion at subcommittee, the review was shelved, never having been brought to the City Council for planning, despite that reviewing showing a backlog of \$70M in urgent repairs. The School Committee and the City Council continue to rest on the funding of new high school buildings, ignoring the massive underfunding of annual capital spending and neglecting any comprehensive plan for building replacement beyond Burncoat High. It is abundantly clear to me that our buildings, some of which date back nearly to the Civil War, have been long neglected, and thus cannot best serve our children, particularly those with disabilities. My commitment on this is to bring forward the report for a comprehensive review, in conjunction with a review of ADA compliance, for a plan and timeline to be brought to the Worcester City Council for funding. As I pushed for the facilities review to be done during my prior time on the Committee, fulfilling this work is important to me.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)

"I will push for full compliance. There is no reason our school should not be able to accommodate children with disabilities (this also applies to all staff, we should not have buildings that are inaccessible. I will fight to make sure this happens in a timely manner." (John Trobaugh)

## 2. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

➤ Do you oppose or support teaching disability history in the Worcester Public Schools?

✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O'Connell Novick; John Trobaugh

✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected, what specific actions, if any, will you take to integrate disability history with WPS curriculum? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

### RESPONSES:

"Every single student in our schools deserves to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the history that we are teaching. To begin, I would recognize Disability History Week at the school committee meeting in early October, and in preparation, would make some of the wonderful resources that exist available to schools to incorporate this critical history into school activities. In the long term, history of people with disabilities should be incorporated into our ongoing education about people's history. More information about what is and is not being incorporated will help to determine next steps to meet that goal." (Cara Berg Powers)

"Mainstream secondary schools teach children hardly anything about the disability links in history. I believe that this should change. Just as lessons about the Holocaust were aimed at reducing religious discrimination, just as lessons about slavery were aimed at reducing racial discrimination, I believe that teaching children how disabled people were treated in important periods of history, or that historical figures were disabled, might just reduce disability discrimination, or maybe even disability hate crimes, in the future. I would write policy to the city and state to make it a mandate." (Chantel Bethea)

"As a school committee member I advocate for looking through the lens of ADA incorporating the learning needs of each student including the culture of the students. I advocate as a school committee member the practices to meet the needs of over 5000 students which comes to approximately 21% of our students with documented disabilities. I advocate for the continued involvement of C.a.s.t. which is a program that leads learning with no limits, making education more inclusive and effective including working with partners in our community. I also as a school committee member advocate for WPS staff and administration to continue working together with the universal design for learning UDL which has three primary neurological networks that impact learning 1.

What students learn. 2. How students process information 3. Affective network in-line with students attitudes and feelings about incoming information and most importantly motivation to engage the WHY students want to learn and engage.” (Dianna Biancheria)

“I support including into the US history curriculum the civil rights actions that succeeded in bringing Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all students in 1973 and full access with the American with Disabilities Act. Teaching this history will also dispel some of the misconceptions and fears that students may have towards those with disabilities. It will also give a sense of pride to students who are still fighting for their rights today.” (Jack Foley)

“I support the History and Social Studies Framework approved by the State that supports Civics as well as more content in all grade levels that integrates specific key points of Disability History.” (Molly McCullough)

“I would work with our Superintendent in requesting administration review what we are presently doing as a system. I am aware that students in some schools are exposed to the history of disabilities in this country and teachers are having students read books on this topic.

An elective course on the History of Disabilities should be offered and I would advocate for such a course. There are many lessons to learn from the past such as how people with disabilities were treated in society. Also, one needs to learn about disabled slaves and how they were treated and about leaders in our society who had a disability but were successful. I believe that teaching our students how disabled people were treated in the past may reduce disability discrimination or even disability hate crimes in the future. Perhaps more sensitivity can occur if a course were offered. Students with a disability are most venerable and we need to do everything possible to educate other students about showing kindness to others.” (John Monfredo)

“The Worcester School Committee has yet to receive a comprehensive update on the recently revised history and social studies standards, passed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in May of 2018. As one who attends all of their meetings, I followed those revisions closely, and among the updates was a specific calling out of disability history, along with a myriad of other traditionally underrepresented and frequently misrepresented groups. Certainly, a comprehensive report on this to the Worcester School Committee is overdue; it is among the reports I plan to request from the administration. Ensuring that our own teaching and learning of history in the district fully represents the revisions is crucial.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)

“I believe that our children should learn about all aspects of diversity. Disability history is particularly important as our graduates are entering the workforce. If they have a disability, then they should know not just their rights, but how those rights came to be. If they do not have a disability then they should know how the laws came to be so that when they are in the workforce they don’t accidentally perpetuate an ablest perspective. In addition, one never knows when one might have something happen where they themselves need accommodations due to a disability.” (John Trobaugh)

### 3. INCLUSION IN ALL STUDENT ACTIVITIES

➤ Do you oppose or support inclusion of students with disabilities in all student activities (including after school programming) in the school district?

✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracey O'Connell Novick; John Trobaugh

✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected, what specific actions, if any, would you take to ensure inclusion and access to student's activities (including after school programming) for students with disabilities? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

#### RESPONSES:

"Certainly ADA compliance will be part of this equation, and so this will go in hand with that reporting. Being raised by a Disabled father has given me a unique vantage point on this question in particular- I've seen how important participation in student activities was to my father building a strong self-esteem, sense of belonging, and resilience to go on to college and career. Again, we need data to see what in and out of school time supports are being met for students across a wide range of abilities. In my voter outreach this year, I've heard from too many parents who have had to fight for their kids to access the most basic in-school services. I know we have a long way to go, but to see exactly what the solutions are, we need to collect information about where our gaps are." (Cara Berg Powers)

"I would start with the teacher's attitudes towards our children with disabilities. I would give our teachers more training so that we can ensure that our children are feeling good when interacting with our teachers. Inclusive education for students with disabilities can only be successful when those students feel that they are truly a part of the school community. This requires open and honest discussion about difference, and an institutional respect for people of all backgrounds and abilities. In inclusive schools, the establishment of such a climate benefits everyone by fostering an environment where students and their families are valued for who they are." (Chantel Bethea)

"As a school committee member I realize there are challenges with staffing for after school programs. We need to work with administration to provide additional mentoring programs that include recreational and academics engaging activities, also unified sports is dependent on the interest of the students." (Dianna Biancheria)

"I have always been an advocate for all students to be able to participate in student activities. It is essential for our students to feel part of their school community, and I would work with the administration to ensure this is happening." (Laura Clancey)

"As a father who went to mediation against the Worcester Public Schools to gain inclusion for my daughter in her neighborhood high school, I absolutely support inclusion for all students in the least restricted environment. To make inclusion work in the classroom settings, we need to reduce the number of students in the classroom and provide classroom teachers the professional development for successful inclusion and

support they need to be effective. The new state funding will help make that possible. Expansion of existing “Best Buddy” programs and the identification of peer mentors will help with inclusion afterschool programming.” (Jack Foley)

“The Federal disabilities Act do require that school districts place students in the least restrictive environment and the Worcester Public Schools does follow the law. Of course in many situations modifications do take place ... assistance of an itinerant teacher with special education training, use of computer-assisted devices, special education training for the classroom teacher, use of a resource room and much more.

However, IDEA does not require that every student with a disability be placed in the regular classroom regardless of individual abilities and needs. The reason being is that regular class placement may not be appropriate for all disabled students for not one size fits all. That’s why an Individual Education Plan must be drawn up by the school with the assistance of the parents.

As a former principal I am well aware of the importance of meeting with parents to come up with a plan to meet the needs of our students. When there are problematic situations and parents contact me I have been there to assist them.

Our district does consult with experts to address risk factors that impact student learning... trauma, school refusal and Social and Emotional Behaviors, etc.” (John Monfredo)

“Too frequently, systems operate on the assumption that those who are not participating don’t wish to, rather than operating on the assumption that all would if we made it possible. So it is with Worcester Public Schools’ programs. Barriers of language, of income, of transportation, of ability, bar students and families from participating. I know from my work on policy that approaching policy, budget, and the work of the district from the other direction, as it were, makes a very big difference in outcomes: who are our students and who are our families? What is needed in order to allow them to participate? Our district policies need revision from an equity lens, but so do our district programs. It is my commitment that such is my approach to the work of the Committee.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)

“I would want to ensure all children had equal access to afterschool activities. I propose a policy that if there is an afterschool activity either on the WPS premises or sponsored by WPS that each program have a plan in place that allows for all children to have equal access. A component of this policy would be that the plan be accessible to all parents via the programs web page or an after school program page on that site’s WPS page.” (John Trobaugh)

## SECTION II: DISCIPLINE/ BULLYING

The Commission on Disability reviews and makes recommendations about policies, procedures, services and activities of city departments to bring about full and equal participation by people with disabilities.

### 1. REMOVALS AND SUSPENSIONS

➤ Do you oppose or support a review of disciplinary removals and suspensions to determine if students with disabilities are disproportionately represented?

✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O'Connell Novick; John Trobaugh

✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected, what specific actions would you take, if any, to address disciplinary removals and suspensions of students with disabilities? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

#### RESPONSES:

"I will begin by saying we don't necessarily need a review to see IF students with disabilities are being disproportionately represented in our discipline practices. They are. In fact, these students are more than twice as likely to receive an out of school suspension than the general student population. Based on the conversations I've had over the past few months with many parents that have experienced challenges in accessing the services they believe that their children need, I'd like to seek outside research support in determining our overall compliance with IDEA and it's potential connections to discipline disparities." (Cara Berg Powers)

"Say a child runs, out-of-control, down the busy school hallway and punches another child. The other child starts to cry while the disruptive child continues down the hall, not responding to the teacher aide's commands to stop. The adult says, "The child is special ed, there's nothing that we can do. You can't send him/her to detention. I'll tell his/her teacher." The aide is frustrated and upset and comforts the crying child.

Another child, who is labeled seriously emotionally disturbed, sets a trash can on fire. When brought to the principal's office the security specialist is told that it is a manifestation of the child's disability and the usual disciplinary procedures will not be followed. The security specialist leaves muttering, "Those kids get away with murder!"

Both examples are serious, wrongful misunderstandings of the procedural safeguards of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA procedural safeguards were designed to assure that students with disabilities (receiving special education and related services) were not arbitrarily removed from their parent-approved program without consent and were guaranteed a free and appropriate public education within the least restrictive environment. There is nothing in IDEA that restricts schools from disciplining children with disabilities. Some would say that, by not addressing these dangerous behaviors, the student with special needs is not receiving an "appropriate"

education. Both above children may need specialized services to change the disruptive and dangerous behavior and to make sure that whatever discipline is used works in preventing a reoccurrence of that behavior.” (Chantel Bethea)

“Addressing disciplinary actions include internal review of supports for trauma clinical and mental, social and emotional behavior with tier 1 supports. Review of IEP’s including adjustments are necessary and involvement of family members, any medical documents should be reviewed each time any disciplinary removal is recommended. Anytime bullying is involved with the situation that needs to be equal across the district.”(Dianna Biancheria)

“I find it important to always to review any data that we can collect. If there are disproportionate removals and or suspensions than it would be important for us to see where and why this maybe happening.” (Laura Clancey)

“I support a complete review of the suspension and disciplinary data to identify inconsistencies and to assure that these actions have been taken appropriately. The data currently shows a disproportionate number students with disabilities and students of color being disciplined and suspended. It is imperative that we dig deeper into the numbers, understand the offenses and discipline, look at the process to see if it was proper, and explore alternative actions or solutions. Professional development at all levels of the district in social and emotional learning and trauma-informed care is essential. Regarding students with students who were suspended, I want to see if the process was properly handled to determine if their reported offenses were a manifestation of their disabilities.” (Jack Foley)

“First of all I am not a fan of suspensions unless they affect the well-being of other students in the classroom or pose a danger to the school. Keep in mind that there are laws to follow in suspending students with disabilities. In addition, the school should review the current placement to determine whether additional aids and supports can be provided or determine whether a change in placement is appropriate and most importantly, work with the parents.

However, students with disabilities may be subject to long-term suspensions only for misconduct that has been determined to be unrelated to the student’s disability. Section 504 permits school districts to discontinue educational services for disabled students subject to long term suspensions or expulsion from school for non-disability-related misconduct in the same manner as educational services could be discontinued for nondisabled students. Nonetheless IDEA requires that educational services must continue for these students during periods of disciplinary removal that exceed ten school days.” (John Monfredo)

“To be clear, we already have this data, and we already know that students with disabilities are disproportionately represented. In this, as in so much of the work of the district, the first step is to review the data and not to reject it. Then, the work of the Worcester School Committee is to make it part of the goals of the district and of the superintendent for which administration is held accountability in evaluation to show demonstrated progress, supported by the budget and policy passed by the Committee. That (and the below) would take a radical refocusing on the part of both the Committee and the administration, but it is absolutely necessary.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)



“Their should be an annual review of all disciplinary actions and suspensions reviewed by WPS to verify the data, then the data, the report and the assumptions made on this report posted online for the community to engage in a transparent dialog. I believe that if you work for the WPS, then you are motivated by the mission of improving the lives of all our children. Therefore, we should allow open access to this data. This will, eventually, engender the trust needed to make our school the best place to get education.” (John Trobaugh)

## 2. BIAS IN DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

- Do you oppose or support anti-bias training and policies for educators?
  - ✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Tracy O’Connell Novick; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; John Trobaugh
  - ✓ Oppose: (none)
- If elected, what specific actions, if any, would you take to ensure that students are not being disciplined for behavior related to their disability and that proper procedures are followed? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

### RESPONSES:

“As previously stated, I’d like to bring in an external researcher to examine the extent to which this is a problem for the Worcester Public Schools. The prevalence of this topic, anecdotally, in the hundreds of conversations I have had with parents since beginning to run indicates to me that we need a full accounting of our compliance with existing disability law. Anti-bias trainings are a critical component for all of our educators, and we need to ensure that this a priority, not just an extra thing added to the already overloaded professional development load of our educators. We need to align our professional development with our priorities of our district, including safe and supported learning environments for all students.” (Cara Berg Powers)

“I would make sure that the procedures were listed in and around the school so that everyone was on the same page as to what needs to be done if there is ever a situation that we need to handle. Also there needs to be training on how to work with our children with social and emotional challenges. Teachers and aides, I would suggest this training on a monthly basis and a check in with a counselor and or principal weekly to let staff know if they had a challenge and how they are dealing with it during that week. I would suggest that the principals and counselors keep an open-door policy for our teachers and aides.” (Chantel Bethea)

“As a school committee member I advocate to continue with cultural training which includes protections under the IEP issues and includes emotional disability versus manifestation of their disability. As a school committee member I will continue to advocate for training and protections that include best practices, successful supports for all staff.” (Dianna Biancheria)

"I would rely on the student's team to make this determination in the student's manifestation meetings." (Laura Clancey)

"As human beings, implicit bias exists in all of us and we need to check our actions and our perceptions on a daily basis to assure that they are not being driven by bias. Every organization needs to assist their employees in recognizing this potential bias and misconception in the workplace. This is particularly true in a public school setting with students and families from so many diverse backgrounds that may be very different from the educators' backgrounds. This diversity may be racial, geographic, sexual orientation, political or family incomes. I expect that the new Chief Diversity Officer in the WPS will initiate anti-bias professional development. As I mentioned in the previous answer, any review of suspensions and disciplinary actions against students with disabilities must also determine if these offenses were the result of their disabilities, thus they are not responsible for that behavior." (Jack Foley)

"I am always asking for data on suspensions and would review what has been taking place within our district for the school system does maintain data on suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities and provides such information to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. If significant discrepancies between suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities are compared to students without disabilities are identified, the school district reviews and when appropriate revises its policies, procedures, and practices.

Again, as I stated in the previous question, the school district provides the procedural protections of the law to students eligible for special education who are suspended for 10 consecutive school days or who are suspended for less than 10 consecutive or cumulative school days during the school year but the nature of the suspensions constitute a pattern. In such cases, the school district conducts a manifestation determination hearing and then makes a decision." (John Monfredo)

"(I assume this question should instead be regarding anti-bias training)  
This is absolutely crucial work for all in education. I was encouraged by the way in which this was embraced by teachers in Boston's Gardner Pilot Academy, as related in the recent issue of Teaching Tolerance. What we absolutely cannot continue to do is to ignore and deny this as an issue of concern, which has been the current strategy at a district level. As I mentioned above, this should be among the goals of the district and the superintendent; I would go a step farther from that goal setting (which is the purview of the School Committee) and add a standing item on the agenda for a twice a month report on the work of equity in the Worcester Public Schools." (Tracy O'Connell Novick)

"As a diversity professional, I believe that anti bias training is always a good idea, even when there are no indications of disproportionate treatment of students and staff. We often overlook the impact of anti-bias and diversity education amongst our staff. However, after speaking with teachers and other staff in the WPS, it is clear that the staff need to know others have been through the training and that the administration will support them if they do not feel they have been treated fairly." (John Trobaugh)

### 3. ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES

➤ Do you oppose or support supportive strategies to ensure all students with disabilities can graduate?

- ✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; Tracy O'Connell Novick; John Monfredo
- ✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected what specific strategies and proposed accommodations, if any, would you advance to ensure that students with emotional, behavioral and mental health disorders graduate from high school? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

#### RESPONSES:

"I look forward to learning from organizations like the Disability Commission what promising practices exist in order to support them from an elected role. There is a great deal of research in this regard, and I look forward to actively seeking the input of those most impacted to bring their voices forward in proposing interventions, programs, and supports." (Cara Berg Powers)

"My strategic plan would include:

- use of scientific research to inform practice
- need for accountability and transparency
- culturally and ethnically responsive teaching
- fidelity of implementation
- data driven decision-making.
- effective district and school leadership
- high quality ethical teaching
- pre-service and job embedded professional development
- collaboration with special services
- family engagement
- access/use of technology.

To be effective in promoting the social, emotional and behavioral growth of students, there must be a broad effort to provide positive behavioral interventions and supports. This effort needs to be schoolwide, proactive, comprehensive and systematic in providing a continuum of supports designed to afford opportunities to all students, including those with identified emotional or behavioral disabilities. While traditional behavior management practices seek to eliminate undesirable behaviors, use of functional assessments increase the capacity of school and district personnel to adopt and sustain the use of effective behavioral practices. Such practices not only address the specific needs of students with severe behavior problems but also can result in improved school climate and an increase in the achievement level of all students." (Chantel Bethea)

"I do support strategies to ensure all students with disabilities can graduate. As the former WPS district school to career partnership coordinator I had experience of working with staff placing students in unpaid and paid internships. As a school committee member I have continued to review the transition program for students 14 years and older that include plans of career skills or perhaps college with a focus on vocational education and experiences with general IEP Accommodations. As a school committee member attending graduations I have experienced the honor, joy and felt the camaraderie as our students receive their diploma or certificate of attainment." (Dianna Biancheria)

"Working with the special education department to get the funding they need to be able to meet the individual services students to help get them to graduate." (Laura Clancey)

"I support fully the opportunity for students with disabilities to graduate with their peers. The portfolio assessments provide a pathway for these students to achieve graduation. One caution for students with disabilities and their families is that they need to make sure that they are ready for life after high school. Students with disabilities need to begin planning this transition at age 14. Worcester has a good transitions program that introduces career pathways and life experiences for students with disabilities, but Worcester needs to do more to inform and assist in this work." (Jack Foley)

"Every student should have the right to an education and have the opportunity to receive a high school diploma. It is difficult for many students with a disability to move forward and graduate from a high school. Students with disabilities need us to advocate for them to make sure they are getting the additional support from their school. We also need to encourage parents to be part of the learning process and advocate for their child.

I believe that we need to look at after school tutoring, mentoring programs, additional social and emotional help and be sure that parents are included as part of the team. Many students with disabilities learn differently and the schools need to accommodate these students with supplementary help. Many of the same students also need additional practice after school and at home.

Also, teachers need to teach differently and perhaps extra professional development training may have to take place. More direct instruction in communication and organizing strategies should be part of the teacher training. This success will lead to more self-esteem on the part of the student and will encourage them to be part of his graduating class." (John Monfredo)

"The recent reports regarding the rate at which our students, particularly those with disabilities, are graduating, should concern us; instead, there has been such rejection of the basic data that the state is coming to present on it. The district has unfortunately lost much of its central capacity, both of analyzing and understanding the use of data, and of structuring district systems to support struggling students. That must be rebuilt at the central administrative level in order for schools to be appropriately supported in their work with students. My hope as well is that the Legislature will pass and fund the Student Opportunity Act; should that happen, a reworking of the district budget process for greater transparency and public input is necessary, such that the needs of the district are met." (Tracy O'Connell Novick)

“I know that there is a gap between the students with severe disabilities and the mainstreamed students. Our school psychologists feel we could be using them more. I would create a panel to address the issue with educators, parents, school psychologists and students (current and recent graduates) to see what plans they could envision, short term and long term. I would make sure the panel engages the evidence base to see if or how other districts have been successful.” (John Trobaugh)

### **SECTION III: SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**

The Commission on Disability works to ensure that all Worcester residents and visitors with disabilities have access to city programs and services by providing information and referral, advocacy, outreach and educational programs.

#### **1. JOB READINESS**

➤ Do you oppose or support tracking outcomes for job readiness training and job placement for students exiting transition services?

- ✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O’Connell Novick; John Trobaugh
- ✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected, what specific actions, if any, will you take to improve upon job readiness training and increase job placement for students exiting transition services?

*Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

#### **RESPONSES:**

“While I have read last year’s presentation to the Commission by the transitional services program, I have a great deal to learn still about how best to increase job placement. We’ll definitely need to work closely with the Commission and other advocacy bodies to ensure that employers have the training and experience to be part of a strong continuum. I have supported the creation of hundreds of youth jobs as a non-profit director, a great many for students with various disabilities. I look forward to bringing my experience to the table to build strong community collaborations to support our students together.” (Cara Berg Powers)

“I would have a roles of transition plan established for each student transitioning like this:  
Student’s Role – Parents’/Guardians’ Role – Teacher’s/Case Manager’s Role – School Guidance Counselor’s Role – Other Agency Representatives’ Role

In the first step (assess), educators assess, as applicable, students’ interests, preferences, needs, and aptitude, if applicable, related to desired post-school outcomes using formal and informal assessments. The second step (plan) involves interpreting assessment results, using the data to create appropriate IEP goals, selecting the appropriate courses of study and diploma/exit option, and developing appropriate transition services. In the third step (instruct), students engage in meaningful transition-related activities and learn the skills needed to reach their post-school goals. Students

should also be linked to services and agencies needed to meet the transition goal. In the last step (evaluate) educators evaluate whether student progress has been made toward achieving the transition skills and transition IEP goals.” (Chantel Bethea)

“I support tracking outcomes for job readiness training and job placement for students exiting transition services. Tracking outcomes is essential to the success of paid and unpaid internships as these internships can lead to part time and full-time employment. Tracking programs that enable students in a transition program can only be beneficial and improve partners in our community. As a school committee member I will continue to advocate for vocational education which includes job readiness skills and increases opportunities of career options.” (Dianna Biancheria)

“We need to do a much better job tracking students exiting our school system. One place I know we can do a better job is around our 688 referrals and follow up. As a school system, we also need to work on referring and collaborating with the numerous agency and training programs we have access to in Worcester.” (Laura Clancey)

“The Worcester Public Schools have made some progress with their transitions program for students with disabilities, but there is much more to be done. For some students, this program provides career exploration opportunities that become employment after school, along with independence and life skills development such as transportation and finances. Worcester can do more to partner with employers interested in employing graduates with disabilities, identify the skill sets prepared for these workforce opportunities. Worcester and the Commonwealth’s Department of Developmental Services need to work more collaboratively in this transition and the potential for job coaches for graduates at the age of 22.” (Jack Foley)

“Internships should all be part of their transition from school to the work force for according to statistics there are many students with disabilities who drop out of high school. We need to try, as a district, to give many of these students an adequate vocational education in their high school years. Vocational training should provide students with a curriculum that prepares them for the job that they intend to enter. Specific skills should be part of the training for they are necessary for survival in the workplace and in the community.

Students with a disability can stay in school until they are 22 years old and the district needs to work with the parents in preparing readiness training and job placement before they move on. Research states good transition planning and services are needed to assist special education students to flourish after high school. The best transition planning should include:

1. An accurate and thoughtful assessment of a student’s abilities and interests.
2. Clear, measurable goals related to his or her postsecondary aspirations.
3. Appropriate support and services to help them achieve their goals.

We all need to reexamine what we are doing in our SPED program and evaluate the best practices taking place and advocate for additional resources. The bottom line ... schools must give more focus in both time and resources to preparing noncollege students for work in the community. I would advocate for that!” (John Monfredo)

“This would require budgetary support for such a tracking system. I would first want a report from the special education department around how this could best be done such

that students' FERPA rights were not violated. Knowing where students go and how they fare, though, is crucial to appropriately meeting their needs." (Tracy O'Connell Novick)

"I believe we should be tracking all outcomes, but especially for students who are exiting transitional programs. I believe that the business community might even be able to help with this. We really need to track all outcomes, we must create a culture of continuous improvement in order to raise up Worcester." (John Trobaugh)

## 2. ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

➤ Do you oppose or support the school district to improve access for students with disabilities to go on to higher education?

✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O'Connell Novick; John Trobaugh

✓ Oppose: (none)

➤ If elected, what strategies, if any, would you develop to improve access to local institutions of higher education for students with disabilities? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

"As is the case across of most of our indicators, students with disabilities fare much worse than the general population in likely college attendance, at only 43.4%. As faculty at two of our local universities, I know that higher education is working hard to be more accessible, but our students need to get there first. How are we including students with disabilities in college preparation curriculum, guidance, and activities? Do our guidance counselors have the supports that they need to help students with disabilities navigate their individual circumstances to find the right fit and journey for them? Again, working with advocates who have a better understanding of the barriers than I do will help me to ensure I am advocating for the right interventions and policies." (Cara Berg Powers)

- "Define College and Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities
- Set High Expectations, Aspirations, and Clear Goals for Students with Disabilities
- Improve Use of Diagnostic Assessments and Data to Inform Instruction
- Develop the Capacity of Educators to Use Rigorous Research-based Instructional Practices
- Develop and Assess Multiple Types of Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Behaviors Important to Life Success
- Improve Access to Guidance, Counseling, and Transition Services
- Create Transparent High School Diploma Options
- Create Multiple Pathways to College and Careers" (Chantel Bethea)

"I support the school district improving access for students with disabilities to go onto higher education. Continuing our partnership's with higher education expanding and developing relationships that can provide and improve opportunities is all part of the process to achieve this type of success. Perhaps establishing a committee of members of the school committee, WPS administration and staff of our cites higher education can

expand on a successful initiative under WPS of 100 Males to college.” (Dianna Biancheria)

“First, I would work with the disabilities departments at local institutions to try and develop a protocol for WPS students to introduce them to their services. This is important since many students don’t even know they exist in higher education programs.” (Laura Clancey)

“After several decades of advances with inclusion and access in K-12 education, the next step for including students with disabilities in similar opportunities for all students is access to higher education. Since 2007, Massachusetts has operated a successful program for providing access for students with disabilities to public higher education called the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative. Unfortunately, Quinsigamond Community College stopped being a partner in this effort several years ago, but there are still students with disabilities attending both QCC and Worcester State University. We need to do more to grow this opportunity and to bring both QCC and WSU on board as partners in the statewide initiative.” (Jack Foley)

“The goal of the district would be to encourage ALL students to have access to higher learning if they have the ability and the desire. The district’s job is to support the student to achieve that goal.

First of all, early identification of a potential learning disability is vital to a child’s long term outlook. Thus, screening for disabilities by the district during the early years is essential. When a student is diagnosed with a learning disability, it is important for an individualized education plan (IEP) to be developed that will identify the areas in which a student struggles so that the proper supports can be put in place to encourage their success. Then it is essential to give the student the necessary support system and monitor his progress.

Schools must work with the parents and encourage both student and parents to work as a team at home. Depending on the disability schools can offer additional support after school or work with college students as tutors. In high school, parents and students need to discuss the opportunity and goal of higher education with the guidance counselor and start early on.

Under the law, it is the student’s right to ask that the school of their choice provide the necessary accommodations and services. However, it is in the student’s best interest to seek out a school with a good track record in providing services to students with disabilities. This can be accomplished with assistance from guidance.” (John Monfredo)

“I believe we should be tracking all outcomes, but especially for students with disabilities. I believe that the higher education community might even be able to help with this. We really need to track all outcomes, we must create a culture of continuous improvement in order to raise up Worcester.” (John Trobaugh)

“I’m curious about the focus here on local institutions of higher education; I’d like to see access to all higher education institutions. As things stand, the Worcester Public Schools poorly serves our students through the college application, admission, and decision making process, as I know too well, having just had a daughter go through it. We need dedicated staffing of this issue who meet with and shepherd students through the process. That takes funding, which we have too little of, but it also takes appropriate professional development, such that students aren’t given bad advice or led off track.



Such staff need to know their students, their strengths, their needs for support (including disabilities) such that good matches can be made with colleges.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)

### 3. POST TRANSITION PROGRAM SUPPORT

- Do you oppose or support increased communication between students and families to prepare them for exiting the transition program?
  - ✓ Support: Cara Berg Powers; Chantel Bethea; Dianna Biancheria; Laura Clancey; Jack Foley; Jermoh Kamara; Molly McCullough; John Monfredo; Tracy O’Connell Novick; John Trobaugh
  - ✓ Oppose: (none)
- If elected, how would you improve the notification to students and families about support services upon exiting transition program? *Answer in 250 words or less. Please note that in the event that individual answers go beyond 250 word count limit the Commission will only print the first 250 words.*

#### RESPONSES:

“Family communication is one of the ways we can most impact indicators positively across the entire district. If students participated in a traditional college education, they may have access to a career services office, essentially in perpetuity. What kind of structures could exist for that within the confines of the Worcester Public Schools. I’m also troubled by the requirement that students not have any high school discipline record in order to participate in this program, especially given the enormous discipline disparities for our students with disabilities.” (Cara Berg Powers)

“A truly successful transition process is the result of comprehensive team planning that is driven by the dreams, desires and abilities of youth. A transition plan provides the basic structure for preparing an individual to live, work and play in the community, as fully and independently as possible.

I would make sure there would be a book or packet with communications from contact names and numbers to agency with a point of contact. If we keep in contact throughout the child’s entire school years this will be just a recap of what was discussed.” (Chantel Bethea)

“I support increased communication between students and families to prepare them for exiting the transition program.” (Dianna Biancheria)

“Working with our guidance and special education departments to look at setting up ways to inform families and students about what is available to them once they exit Worcester Public Schools. Some ideas are having information sessions as we do with College Financial Aid nights.” (Laura Clancey)

“Transition from high school to college or careers requires planning and preparation. This is especially true for students with disabilities, for the options may be limited after leaving high school. Families need to know more about the opportunities for their children before

the reach transition age and the potential for additional support once they turn 22. In my role as co-chair of the Central Regional Advisory Board for the Department of Development Services, we are pushing the state and the local school districts to have informational sessions in multiple languages for parents as early as ages 12-14 for their children. Successful exiting of the transitional programs can only occur if there has been significant planning for this transition and the student has received sufficient career development and life skills training.” (Jack Foley)

“It is absolutely imperative that we reach out and work with the parents on what is being done to support their child before they exit the transition program. Parents need to be a KEY player from the inception of the plan. In their IEP there should be a plan and updated each year as the student moves forward toward the workforce... Teachers on the other hand need to support students’ career development for they should be encouraging and redirecting students toward realistic career goals with the assistance of their parents.

As we well know, work is essential to a livelihood, a sense of worth and overall life satisfaction. Thus, we need to do everything possible as a district to assist those students who are disabled and encourage and teach them the necessary skills to make it in the work force. This should all be spelled out in their IEP starting in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of high school.” (John Monfredo)

“I don’t know enough about what is done now such that I can make useful suggestions on how to improve it; I would start by wanting to hear more from families on this issue before seeing in what ways the policy and budgeting authorities of the School Committee are most usefully brought to bear.” (Tracy O’Connell Novick)

“We need to support our families and our students. When you have a child with disabilities the individualized education plan and the medical accommodations plans are overwhelming at first. It must be time of very high anxiety when your child begins to exit a transitional program. We need to do every thing we can to make the student successful on their own terms and abilities. This, like the rest, needs to be continuously evaluated so that each year it can improve.” (John Trobaugh)

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE