

Ward 6 School Board Candidates Forum

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Ward 6 School Board Candidates' Forum
Monday, October 25, 2010, 6:00 – 7:30PM
Maury Elementary School

Introductions by: Charles Allen of the Ward 6 Democrats
Sponsor Questions Moderated by: Mark Seagraves of WTOP and DC50
Audience Question Moderated by: Andrew Lightman of the Hill Rag

OPENING STATEMENT: MELISSA ROHAN

Melissa Rohan is the mother of two young children, one who is 2 years old and the other who is 4 months old, and therefore has a vested interest in DCPS. She wants her kids to be able to go to quality neighborhood schools but realizes that that's not always possible now.

She was on the board of Hill Preschool and the executive board of Jenkins Hill Child Development Center and has taught ESL in DC and in Miami. Her mother-in-law is also a public school teacher.

Ms. Rohan is a proponent of charter schools and believes parents should have the option to choose which school is best for their child. She is supported by many ANCs, WUFPAC (Women Under Forty PAC), and others.

OPENING STATEMENT: MONICA WARREN-JONES

Monica Warren-Jones has lived in Ward 6 for 12 years. She has two children who have been enrolled in the Capitol Hill Cluster School for the last seven years. During the past ten years, she has seen a lot of changes in Ward 6.

Before the mayoral takeover of the schools, the School Board was primarily concerned with school operations. Since the mayoral takeover, DC has created a State Board of Education which concerns itself with quality standards for schools. As the Ward 6 representative on the State Board of Education, Ms. Warren-Jones hopes to eliminate achievement gaps, have strong parental support in schools, and have each school meet quality standards.

ON DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND CANDIDATES' STRENGTHS

Melissa Rohan believes that parental support is one of the greatest strengths of DCPS. She stated that, in DC, parents lead change in schools and noted that, in the last few years, there have also been great reforms in the schools. As the Ward 6 representative on the DC State Board of Education, Melissa Rohan will be parents' biggest advocate.

Monica Warren-Jones has been a parent in the DCPS system for seven years and has children at the Capitol Hill Cluster School. She has served on the executive board of the Capitol Hill Cluster School and has gotten to know the administration and teachers. She

also has a background in affordable housing and housing development, a Master's in Business Administration, and a Master's in Public Administration.

ON “NOT-SO-GREAT” SCHOOLS IN WARD 6

Monica Warren-Jones believes that Amidon-Bowen Elementary School is an example of a not-so-great school in Ward 6. The steps are in ill repair, and although there are two early education programs – one associated with DCPS and the other with Apple Tree – there is a large quality gap between the two programs.

Melissa Rohan is very involved at Amidon-Bowen Elementary School where her children are supposed to go. She stated that students at Amidon-Bowen believe that the community thinks they're bad, not smart, and not good. Ms. Rohan believes that no children should feel that way. She also believes that schools should not fail students and that students should not feel that the community expects them to fail.

ON MAYORAL CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS AND EXPANDED AUTHORITY FOR THE DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Melissa Rohan believes that, so far, mayoral control of the schools has been good. Although she's sad that the take-over was necessary and although she doesn't agree with all of the methods employed by Rhee and Fenty, she does believe that there have been many great changes and thinks that Fenty and Rhee did a great job. She thinks it may make sense to expand the board's powers at some point, but she is not fully confident in the school board, so that may have to wait. If elected, she hopes to hash out her plans for the DC State Board of Education with Vincent Gray.

Monica Warren-Jones believes that the current structure with the schools under mayoral control is good. She would, however, like to see certain expanded authority given to the DC State Board of Education.

ON CHARTER SCHOOLS AND VOUCHERS

Monica Warren-Jones has noticed an increase in enrollment at both public and charter schools, and especially at charter schools, and believes that there may be a need for more schools. She stated that the DC State Board of Education has no control over private school funds and that the legislature and citizens need to discuss the use of local funds for vouchers. She, personally, does not believe that local funds should go to paying for private schools through the use of vouchers, although she does think that federal funds could be used to support them.

Melissa Rohan believes that charter schools are fantastic and are doing a slightly better job than public schools at providing quality education. She would like to see public schools take their cues from the charter schools. She would also like to see the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program renewed. She believes that sending children across the city or even across the ward to attend school is not always the best option.

ON OUT-OF-STATE STUDENTS AT DCPS

Monica Warren-Jones stated that the DC State Board of Education has set residency standards for DC Public Schools. She believes that individual schools should review these standards and monitor who belongs at their schools.

Melissa Rohan has no set plan regarding what to do. She believes that out-of-state students should not take up taxpayer seats especially at limited enrollment lottery schools.

CLOSURE OF WARD 6 SCHOOLS

Melissa Rohan does not want any more schools to be closed. She also believes that old school facilities should remain schools and be made available to charter programs.

Monica Warren-Jones wants the process of how schools are put up for closure to be streamlined. She would like the process to be informed by the community, especially with regard to risks and rewards. She believes that charter schools should be given the option of using old school facilities and understands that currently charter schools do not always have that option and are therefore forced to lease commercial space at prohibitive costs.

ON SEX EDUCATION IN DC SCHOOLS

Monica Warren-Jones stated that there are age-appropriate standards in place for health education throughout school and believes that they should be kept in use.

Melissa Rohan believes that schools should have high expectations for their students but that age-appropriateness should always be kept in mind.

ON HEALTHY EATING IN DC SCHOOLS

Melissa Rohan believes that schools should educate students and families about what healthy eating is and that high expectations should be placed on parents. She thinks that dictating what students can eat is a little too much, however.

Monica Warren-Jones understands that what children eat affects their performance and behavior during school. She also understands that DC has one of the highest obesity rates in the United States. She believes that schools should partner with the correct food purveyors and that guidelines about what healthy eating looks like should be set.

ON THE NEW TEACHERS CONTRACT

Monica Warren-Jones is in favor of anything that benefits the teaching profession. She would like to see teachers treated professionally and respected and believes that the contract is a part of that.

Melissa Rohan is not happy with the recent firings. She can't think of any other profession in the United States in which it's acceptable to fire people without giving them 30-60 days notice. She is worried about the teachers in DC schools and believes that they need respect.

ON IMPACT AND USE OF PRIVATE FOUNDATION FUNDING

Melissa Rohan is in favor of IMPACT. She stated that DC spends more money per student than any other urban district in the United States. She doesn't think that taxpayer money should be thrown at the problem without results, however, and would like to see expenditures streamlined. She believes that outside funding for schools is a great idea.

Monica Warren-Jones stated that, although she is glad the tool is in place, IMPACT only applies to core subject area teachers in grades 3-8. She pointed out that many teachers therefore can't participate in IMPACT and can't receive incentive compensation. Ms. Warren-Jones also stated that private foundation funding has always been part of the DCPS budget and that it should continue to be.

ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DC SCHOOLS

Monica Warren-Jones stated that a lot of money is spent on private placement for special education students. She supports mainstreaming special education students in DC schools. She also stated that a lot of money is spent on litigation. She believes that there is a need to keep pushing in that regard.

Melissa Rohan believes that schools should offer quality education for all students. She does not believe that DC Public Schools should bring special education students into the schools until they can provide quality education for these students. She doesn't think that sending special education students to Maryland and Virginia is good either, though, as parents need to be able to reach their kids, e.g., in emergencies.

ON CURRENT MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAN

Monica Warren-Jones noted that Capitol Hill Public Schools Parent Organization (CHPSPO) has put a lot of work into the Ward 6 Middle School Plan and that the plan is supported by DCPS. She believes that the plan is a good one and should be implemented.

Melissa Rohan also likes the Middle School Plan, although she's concerned that there may be changes made to it, especially with regard to Jefferson Junior High School.

ON CHARTER AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PARITY

Melissa Rohan believes that ample opportunities should be provided for schools to flourish and for students to receive quality education.

Monica Warren-Jones stated that parity is required by law and believes that everything should be equal.

ON MONTESSORI EDUCATION IN WARD 6

Monica Warren-Jones is fully in favor of Montessori education in Ward 6. She noted that Ward 6 has many great school options including the Montessori program at Watkins Elementary School, School Within a School at Peabody Elementary School, and Arts Integration.

Melissa Rohan is a big fan of Montessori education, having gone through a Montessori program herself. She believes that the Montessori method is not for all students but that it's great for those for whom it works. She is excited about expanding the Montessori program and would like to see more different ways to teach inspired by charter schools.

ON NON-PARENTAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DC SCHOOLS

Monica Warren-Jones noted that the DC State Board of Education has guidelines for parental involvement in schools. She would like to see these guidelines extended to the entire community and would like to see PTAs implement better guidelines that extend beyond parental involvement.

Melissa Rohan believes that schools should be important to all DC residents. She believes that taxpayers need to know that the schools are good stewards of their money and that graduated students are ready to enter the workforce.

ON SCHOOL BOUNDARIES AND SCHOOL MIGRATION

Melissa Rohan believes it's important to provide quality schools in all wards, with particular concerns in Wards 7 and 8 and parts of Ward 5. She noted that there are limited seats available in charter schools and that students who have to commute across the city or across the ward to attend school are exhausted by the time they get home.

Monica Warren-Jones noted that the current DCPS boundaries are confusing and believes that DCPS should be pushed to make the boundary information clearer. She would like to see each school be the best school it can possibly be.

ON CONVINCING PARENTS TO STICK WITH NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Monica Warren-Jones stated that people thought she was crazy when she and her family moved into their current neighborhood and when her children started attending DC Public Schools. She noted that there is inconsistent quality in DC Public Schools but that families should make a personal choice to invest in their neighborhood schools. She believes that enhanced early education programs in schools such as JO Wilson and Ludlow-Taylor offer increased incentive for families to stick with their neighborhood schools.

Melissa Rohan noted that the reputation of DC schools precedes them and that many people moving into DC already know the reputation of DC schools. She also noted that many families won't stay in the DC Public School system past early education. She believes that a public outreach grassroots campaign is needed to change community expectations of DC schools and to build confidence in schools. She noted that public schools have been in DC since the time of Jefferson and believes in the importance of making sure that parents are on board with public education. She would like to see community expectations for DC schools change to expecting the schools to develop, grow, and prosper.

ON PLANS FOR EASTERN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Monica Warren-Jones supports Eastern High School as an International Baccalaureate school and believes that Eastern should be open admission for all Ward 6 middle schools. She noted that next year will be a planning year for Eastern as the school just hired a new principal who was a senior administrator in the Boston school system.

Melissa Rohan believes that Eastern High School needs to be open admission, as most current high school students from Ward 6 go to Ward 8 to attend school. She believes that Ward 6 should have a neighborhood high school option. She urges DCPS not to go backwards on Eastern and supports an advocacy movement to make sure that the community supports Eastern.

CLOSING REMARKS: MELISSA ROHAN

Melissa Rohan thanked everybody for coming out and supporting the candidates for DC State Board of Education. She hopes to be the first Latina on the DC State Board of Education and would like to advocate for you and your children to have quality options in the DC public and charter schools. To learn more, visit her website (<http://www.melissarohan.com>), send her an e-mail at info@melissarohan.com or call her at (202) 863-2850 or (202) 352-0196.

CLOSING REMARKS: MONICA WARREN-JONES

Monica Warren-Jones thanked everyone for coming out. She wants quality schools across the city and wants to know that students are getting the highest content in all schools. She brings a lot to the job and is endorsed by Ward 6 councilmember Tommy Wells, former Ward 6 councilmember Sharon Ambrose, the Washington Post, and others.