



The Research Bureau

Questions for the 2017 Candidates for City Council and School Committee in Worcester

Report 17-06

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Research in the Public Interest

**Questions for the 2017 Candidates
for City Council and School Committee in Worcester**

This publication is intended to provide candidates and residents in Worcester, Massachusetts with questions for consideration on key topics impacting the community and government. Elections represent critical periods for a society to set agendas and initiate new approaches to resolve community concerns. We offer the following to provoke discussion, debate, and potentially decision as the voters of Worcester select their leaders for the 2018-2020 political cycle.

City of Worcester 2017 Municipal Election

The 2017 Municipal Election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 7, from 7:00am to 8:00pm.

Positions marked with an asterisk () require a Preliminary Election due to the size of the candidate field. The Preliminary Election for Districts 1 and 5 will be held on Tuesday, September 12, from 7:00am to 8:00pm.*

Worcester City Council—At Large (8 Candidates for 6 Positions)

- Morris A. Bergman
- Michael T. Gaffney
- Khrystian E. King
- Konstantina B. Lukes
- Joseph M. Petty
- Gary Rosen
- Benjamin R. Straight
- Kate Toomey

Worcester School Committee (7 Candidates for 6 Positions)

- Dianna L. Biancheria
- Donna M. Colorio
- Dante A. Comparetto
- Jack L. Foley
- Molly O. McCullough
- John F. Monfredo
- Brian A. O’Connell

District 1 Councilor* (4 Candidates for 1 Position)

- Bill Coleman
- Edward L. Moynihan
- Sean M. Rose
- Gerardo Schiano

District 2 Councilor (1 Candidate for 1 Position)

- Candy F. Mero-Carlson

District 3 Councilor (2 Candidates for 1 Position)

- Davis K. Asare
- George J. Russell

District 4 Councilor (2 Candidates for 1 Position)

- Coreen A. Gaffney
- Sarai Rivera

District 5 Councilor* (4 Candidates for 1 Position)

- Douglas F. Arbetter
- Benjamin D. Champagne
- Paul J. Franco
- Matthew E. Wally

Wednesday, October 18, 2017—Last day to register for the 2017 Municipal Election.

Source: City of Worcester Elections Division.

*Questions for the 2017 Candidates
for City Council and School Committee
in Worcester*

The City of Worcester operates under a Council-Manager form of government with a popularly elected Mayor, known as a modified Plan E form of government. The Worcester Public Schools (WPS) system is a quasi-independent department of the City.

The City Council is the City's legislative body while the City Manager serves as chief executive officer. The City Council is comprised of 11 members—six elected city-wide (or at-large) and five elected from districts. The Mayor is the candidate who receives the most votes in the mayoral election and wins an at-large City Council seat. In addition to his or her role as City Councilor, the Mayor serves as the ceremonial head of the government and chairs both the City Council and School Committee. The City Council hires the City Manager and can remove him or her by majority vote. The City Manager hires all City employees (except the City Clerk, City Auditor, and WPS employees), oversees City operations, and presents the City Council with an annual budget that must be approved by June 30 of each year. The City Council has the authority to reduce the City Manager's proposed budget, but not increase it. The approved budget must be balanced.

The Worcester School Committee is the WPS's legislative body while the Superintendent of Schools serves as chief executive officer. The School Committee consists of the Mayor and six elected at-large members. The School Committee sets district-wide school policies, votes on the district budget, and hires and removes WPS personnel.

City Council and School Committee elections are held in odd numbered years.

Questions for Mayoral Candidates

As chair of the City Council and the School Committee, Mayoral candidates should consider all of the questions outlined in this report, whether focused on the needs of the City or the WPS. There are some questions, however, that are pertinent directly to candidates for Mayor and the opportunities offered by that office.

What is the role of the Mayor?

Under the Worcester City Charter, the Mayor is the official head of the City for ceremonial purposes and chair of the City Council and School Committee. While these formal powers are limited, the Mayor has the opportunity to highlight issues impacting the city and schools and form coalitions to address municipal challenges.

What do you believe is the appropriate role of the Mayor as the highest elected office in the City of Worcester?

What will your priorities be as Mayor?

While the Mayor does not set independent policy for the city, he or she is able to highlight issues and build coalitions to move solutions forward.

What priorities will you have for the 2018-2020 term and how will you seek to accomplish them?

How would you work to improve coordination between the City Council and School Committee?

The Mayor is the only official to sit on both the City Council and School Committee, serving as chair of each. In this unique position, the Mayor links the municipal priorities of the City Council with the educational priorities of the School Committee. While the School Committee oversees how the WPS allocates resources, the City Council determines how extensive, or how limited, those resources might be.

How will you facilitate coordination between the City Council and the School Committee and balance municipal and educational concerns?

What are your plans for committee appointments?

A significant amount of City Council business occurs in Standing Committees, comprised of three Councilors appointed by the Mayor. The committees are Economic Development, Education, Municipal Operations, Public Health & Human Services, Public Safety, Public Service & Transportation, Public Works, Rules and Legislative Affairs, Traffic & Parking, Veterans' & Military Affairs, and Youth, Parks & Recreation. Committee chairs, appointed by the Mayor, set meeting schedules and agendas and therefore wield considerable influence over the timing and approval of key items.

The School Committee has four Standing Committees: Accountability & Student Achievement, Finance & Operations, Governance & Employee Issues, and Teaching, Learning & Student Supports.

How would you approach the appointment of committees and chairs? How would you make the committee structure more responsive and effective in addressing important issues?

Questions for City Council Candidates

What are your top priorities for Worcester? What will be your first item of business?

Residents expect municipal government to address a significant number of issues. The City stretches limited resources to maintain operations in a variety of areas.

What are your priorities for the City and how will you seek to implement them? Only one item can be the first order of business—what will be your first initiative as a City Councilor?

What metrics will you use to measure the performance of the City Manager and Administration?

One of the most important jobs of the City Council is overseeing the performance of the City Manager and thus the entire City Administration. Yet the City Council does not set formal annual goals or objectives for the City Manager. As a result, there is little opportunity for the City Manager to proactively improve his or her evaluation based on measurable outcomes. The Research Bureau recently released a report focusing on the City's lack of performance evaluations for its employees, recommending a more formalized process for benchmarking individual employee success and providing feedback to the people who keep the City running.

What measures will you use to determine whether the City Manager is performing adequately and carrying out the priorities of the City Council? Do you think performance evaluations improve public outcomes?

In which Standing Committees would you like to serve?

While the Mayor is responsible for appointing three councilors to each of the 11 Standing Committees, he or she may take individual councilors' qualifications and preferences into account when assigning seats. Committee members have the ability to drive the conversation in a variety of subject areas, and can more easily prioritize their chosen causes. All councilors chair at least one committee, and sit on at least three.

On which Standing Committees would you like to serve? What makes you qualified in those areas, and what policies would you emphasize?

What is the appropriate level of taxation?

The City requires tax revenue to pay for services for its residents. The extent of those taxes is hotly debated. Many of the problems with city infrastructure or services could be mitigated with more money, among other solutions, but overburdening residents with higher taxes could lead to a lower quality of life or even the dislocation of lower-income residents.

Over the years, the City of Worcester has not raised taxes to the amount allowed under Proposition 2 1/2 and Massachusetts General Laws. As a result, the City Council has the ability to increase taxes to raise approximately \$10 million in additional annual revenue without seeking a voter override. Should the City access this untapped tax levy capacity and, if so, how should it spend the new revenues?

The City could also choose not to raise taxes on residents, or even reduce the tax levy. How big of a cut would be needed to satisfy the real or perceived needs of taxpayers, and which areas of the budget could be targeted to ensure that the budget remains balanced?

Should Worcester seek a single tax rate?

Each fall, the City Council sets tax rates for the fiscal year. Worcester taxes commercial and industrial properties at a higher rate than residential properties, creating conflict between residents and businesses as each tries to prove they would be overburdened by proposed tax rates.

Worcester's current residential tax rate is \$19.22 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation while its commercial/industrial tax rate is \$32.93 per \$1,000. The Massachusetts median residential rate is \$15.60 per \$1,000 while the median commercial/industrial rate is \$17.58 per \$1,000. Since the implementation of the dual tax rate, Worcester commercial/industrial property owners have paid approximately \$690 million more in property taxes than they would have paid under a single tax rate, an average of more than \$20 million per year.

In November 2016, The Research Bureau released a report examining the disadvantages of a dual tax rate, calling for an equitable distribution of the tax burden. In May of this year, the Bureau released another report suggesting the possibility of using data such as

business costs and revenues, household costs and incomes, and property values from both categories to evaluate tax sensitivity in a given budget year. The report also offered a variety of options the City could consider to return to a single tax rate.

How will you approach the annual tax rate decision?
Would you work to achieve a single tax rate?

How should the City balance the needs of the neighborhoods with the needs of the downtown?

Worcester has focused significant energy and resources on infrastructure investment and redeveloping downtown to generate new economic activity in the city. Yet the City has also distributed extensive federal funds to neighborhood-based residential, commercial, and human service projects. Some argue Worcester focuses too much on the downtown, or even on citywide infrastructure, to the detriment of the neighborhoods, while others see a redeveloped downtown and broader investment as key to the city's future.

How should the City prioritize its economic development initiatives?

What would you do to combat the opioid crisis?

There were 1,148 overdoses in the City of Worcester in 2016—53 of them fatal. While heroin and other dangerous drugs are not unique to Worcester, the area has been particularly hard-hit by what officials call both a public health crisis and a public safety crisis, as the effects of addiction spread from those directly impacted to the entire community in the form of burdened social services and higher crime rates. The City has tried various strategies to curb the crisis, ranging from equipping first responders with the overdose-reversing drug Narcan to implementing a clean needle exchange, in addition to general outreach. Some of those efforts, notably the needle exchange, have been debated on the Council floor.

Where does the opioid crisis rank on your priority list?
How would you improve the City's response to the effects of addiction and drugs?

Should Worcester serve as a sanctuary city for undocumented immigrants?

So-called "sanctuary cities" are municipalities that do not proactively assist the federal government in identifying or holding undocumented immigrants. While all cities are required to inform the federal government if they have an undocumented immigrant in custody, sanctuary cities release detainees on schedule without regard to immigration status. As a result, federal agents may not be able to arrive in time to take the individual into custody, which some say compromises public safety. Sanctuary city proponents argue that local police departments are not responsible for enforcing all state and federal laws, and that undocumented immigrants who are victims of or witnesses to crime may not seek out or cooperate with local police if they are fearful of deportation, compromising public safety.

In the past year, Worcester's City Council debated this question. As an urban center undoubtedly hosting undocumented immigrants, should Worcester serve as a sanctuary city?

What should the City do to promote safe streets and address enduring criminal activity?

While Worcester is safer than many cities of comparable size, headlines often highlight crime, violence, and drugs. There were 26 shootings with 30 victims in 2016, the lowest numbers since 2012. There were eight homicides, just below the five year average of nine. While most crime is targeted, robberies in public places like convenience stores, brawls in busy commercial corridors, and open-air drug dealing understandably put residents on edge.

What steps can the City take to improve public safety and address the scourges of drugs, gangs, and illegal guns?

How should Worcester approach historic preservation?

First incorporated as a town in 1722, Worcester has a rich history, some of which is represented in prominent or significant buildings. Many of these buildings could soon be demolished, whether because of neglect over the years or developers who want a new program for the property. Grassroots citizen groups have sprung up to advocate for preserving prominent structures such

as Notre Dame des Canadiens and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, while others have said the City cannot afford to let nostalgia limit economic development. While the City has little authority to stop some demolition, it has acted proactively to maintain some structures, notably Stearns Tavern.

What is the City's role in historic preservation? How would you balance respect for the past and planning for the future?

What is your vision and strategy for public transportation in Worcester?

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority cut bus service and raised fares this summer, responding to a decline in state funding and a decrease in ridership that negatively impacted revenue. But public transit advocates point to a disproportionate impact for the economically disadvantaged and the elderly, who tend to depend on such services to get to work or get around. And while a new nonstop train to and from Boston was met with applause, many have noted the route's inconvenient hours and the MBTA has discussed the potential of additional stops to compensate for low ridership.

How important is public transportation in Worcester? Would you attempt to improve service, and if so, how?

Should the City of Worcester require the hiring of residents as a condition of its support for economic development initiatives?

An economic development program generally includes efforts to 1) create jobs, 2) increase real estate investment, and 3) raise the tax base. Tax incentive programs minimize gains in the third category in order to maximize gains in the first and second categories. Increasingly, the City has focused on job creation and local hiring over real estate development, and has sought to minimize impacts on the tax base through restrictions on the level of incentives and tax status of future owners. City tax incentive agreements now include language on local hiring, ownership tax status, employee benefits, and contractor suitability, but too many municipal obligations have the potential of turning a development incentive into a disincentive.

How should the City balance the need for private investment with the desire to achieve public goals?

Should Worcester use eminent domain and public funds to acquire commercial or residential properties as part of its urban renewal initiative?

The Worcester Redevelopment Authority and the City of Worcester are engaged in an urban renewal program centered on downtown. An important tool of urban renewal is the ability to assemble land for development or redevelopment by eminent domain—government's ability to take ownership of property for fair market value regardless of the current property owner's interest in selling.

Do you believe that government should play an active role in the redevelopment of downtown, and do you support property acquisition, by eminent domain if necessary, as part of the urban renewal plan? If so, what properties should be targeted? What are the limits of government involvement?

Does Worcester have sufficient affordable housing?

According to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, approximately 13.4 percent of Worcester's housing stock is "affordable," or government subsidized to ensure accessibility to those generally earning below 80 percent of the area median income. This amount of affordable housing exceeds the 10 percent minimum threshold outlined in Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Laws, exempting Worcester from state override of local zoning to allow the construction of new affordable units. No community adjacent to Worcester has reached the 10 percent threshold.

Should the City continue to subsidize the construction of affordable units, or should it advocate for the expansion of affordable housing in surrounding communities? If Worcester continues to build income-restricted housing, should those units be consolidated in existing lower-income neighborhoods or distributed throughout the City? If the City continues to support the development of affordable units, how should it do so in light of a possible decline in federal funding for such efforts?

How should Worcester deal with trash?

Refuse strewn across Worcester streets has become a regular topic of conversation in the city. While Worcester's status as a dense urban center ensures it will never be trash free, some argue that requiring the purchase of the City's "yellow bags" encourages residents to find cheaper, easier, and sometimes illegal ways to dispose of refuse. Proposed solutions include more bins along commercial corridors, easier drop-off options, and more frequent street cleaning. The City's recycling program has also not escaped criticism; the open-topped bins send debris across neighborhoods on windy days. The City points out that any solution entails logistical considerations and requires an investment of taxpayer money.

What, if anything, should be done about Worcester's trash and recycling collection system? Would you advocate allocating tax dollars or new fees to a potential solution?

How should Worcester address its OPEB liability?

Upon retirement, vested Worcester employees are eligible for both pension and certain other post-employment benefits (OPEB) such as health care. The City has only funded one percent of its OPEB obligation, and currently carries a liability of more than \$860 million. As additional employees join the ranks of the retirees, and insurance costs increase, this amount will continue to expand dramatically—to more than \$2.5 billion in 30 years. The City has made two contributions totaling more than \$1 million to the OPEB Trust over the last two operating budgets and deposits 30 percent of surplus "free cash" each year under the five point financial plan.

What additional steps should the City take to address its OPEB costs and reduce this significant liability on the City's balance sheet?

How should Worcester mitigate the financial burden of its tax-exempt properties?

State law exempts civic, charitable, educational, religious, and benevolent service organizations from state and local taxes. Nearly 30 percent of Worcester's land area is owned by tax-exempt organizations. Two-thirds of that amount is held by government entities (including the City of Worcester), with religious

organizations and educational institutions rounding out the top three. According to the City's Assessor, tax-exempt property represents nearly \$5 billion in value. While these organizations are valuable to the community in many ways, their prevalence does mean less tax revenue to provide municipal services. Some not-for-profit organizations have negotiated Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements with the City to compensate for lost tax revenue or for perceived impacts on public services, but others have not. The City's longtime debate over the Dover Amendment, which gives broad exemptions to nonprofits when it comes to zoning rules, is often touted as a way to gain leverage over tax-exempt entities.

Should the City request that tax-exempt organizations contribute to the cost of government in Worcester? If so, what level of contribution is appropriate? How should such contributions be enforced?

Should Worcester police officers wear body cameras?

Across the nation, the media has highlighted tragic situations during which police and civilian interpretations of events differ. While often this effort is focused on identifying police misconduct, video and audio recordings have also been used to exonerate police behavior. Since many police-resident interactions are one-on-one, body cameras are an opportunity to ensure more accurate information about events with conflicting accounts.

Do you believe Worcester police officers should wear body cameras while on patrol and interacting with the public?

How can Worcester improve the pedestrian experience and reduce pedestrian casualties?

According to a recent study of Massachusetts Department of Transportation data, 50 of the most dangerous intersections in the state are located in Worcester—more than in any other municipality. A walk around many neighborhoods illustrates the challenge that the road network poses to pedestrian safety. Additionally, as a result of legal setbacks, the City has stepped back from its efforts to limit panhandling and fundraising in public rights-of-way. Twelve pedestrians were struck and killed by motorists in 2015, and three were killed last year, to

say nothing of serious injuries from other crashes. The City Council has initiated discussions to lower the citywide speed limit to 25 miles per hour, although that and certain other safety measures inevitably impact traffic efficiency, another concern of many Worcester residents.

How would you work to improve pedestrian safety? Are you in favor of lowering the speed limit? How would you balance walkability and traffic flow?

Should the City look to outsource certain current municipal functions to private entities?

While many municipal functions are unique, some overlap with private sector industries or capacities. Like any large organization, the City manages personnel, revenues and expenses, information technology, and legal challenges. It maintains properties and buildings. It operates a fleet of vehicles. Unlike many other cities, the City—together with the Worcester Redevelopment Authority—oversee a number of major facilities such as Union Station, the DCU Center, and Green Hill Golf Course. Privatization advocates argue that private entities can embrace efficiencies and economies of scale that would reduce the cost of these operations and facilities. Opponents question the marketability of these efforts and suggest that business interests may allow these assets to degrade in an effort to achieve profitability rather than serve residents.

Is the City involved in activities you would consider privatizing? Would you be in favor of selling or leasing any City assets?

What should Worcester do about parking?

Parking is a common complaint for many residents. Whether the issue is its proximity, its expense, or its availability, a lack of satisfactory parking can negatively impact a person's perceived quality of life. As the density of the city increases, parking will increase as a concern for residents and businesses, especially in the downtown. Technology advancements, however, such as autonomous vehicles, present opportunities for expanded car-sharing arrangements and a rethinking of public parking.

A Research Bureau report last year identified a surplus of public and private parking, and argued that

a perceived parking deficit was based more on misconceptions or a lack of information than a need for more spaces. The report called for professional staff to oversee planning, maintaining, and marketing Worcester's parking options, and also identified ways to improve Worcester's parking garages, which are aging and consistently run deficits.

Does Worcester have sufficient parking? What is your approach to parking, and how would you handle demand for more spaces?

Should Worcester look to regulate disruptive technologies like Airbnb, Uber, and Lyft that impact local businesses?

In recent years, a number of new technologies have disrupted traditional industries like hospitality and taxi service. Airbnb enables residents to lease or rent homes as short-term lodging in competition with local hotels. Uber and Lyft enable car owners to compete directly with taxis and liveries to provide rides. These services can undermine currently regulated industries and create tension in neighborhoods when residentially zoned parcels assume a commercial use and activity level.

Should Worcester work to regulate the use of these new industries and should it seek to turn these types of activities into new public revenue sources?

Should Worcester commit public funds to attract the Pawtucket Red Sox?

The Boston Red Sox minor league affiliate Pawtucket Red Sox is exploring a move from its current home in Rhode Island. Worcester has positioned itself as a leading option for a potential relocation, and a local delegation has met with PawSox leadership to discuss the potential of a Triple-A baseball facility. The last PawSox stadium proposal submitted to Pawtucket officials involved \$15 million from Pawtucket taxpayers and \$23 million from the State of Rhode Island. PawSox ownership would likely demand a similar public investment in Worcester. Worcester already hosts the Worcester Bravehearts, a Futures Collegiate Baseball League, at Holy Cross' Hanover Insurance Park.

Should Worcester commit public funding to the construction of a new WooSox stadium?

How should the City Council engage with the Worcester Public Schools?

The Worcester Public Schools has its own governing body, the Worcester School Committee. But given the outsized importance of good schools on quality of life, property values, and economic success—not to mention their impact on the City budget—Councilors have in the past debated or questioned school policies. Some School Committee members have chafed at this perceived infringement, while others argue the City Council cannot simply ignore the public school system.

What is your view of the relationship between the City Council and the Worcester Public Schools? What would you like to see come out of the WPS Strategic Plan?

How should Worcester engage more citizens in local government?

Voter turnout in the City of Worcester is low, with 79 percent of registered voters failing to vote in the 2015 municipal election. Worcester must find new ways to engage the electorate in local governance or the city will function more like an oligarchy than a democracy. In April 2015, The Research Bureau released a report highlighting options for educating and engaging the electorate, including citizen academies, neighborhood councils, and participatory budgeting.

What would you do to promote citizen involvement in local government and increase resident participation in elections and on local boards and commissions?

Questions for School Committee Candidates

What is the role of the School Committee?

Under the Worcester City Charter, the School Committee has broad authority to take “general charge” of the public schools in the city. While the Superintendent of Schools is hired to manage the day-to-day administration of the system, the School Committee is charged with setting policy direction and, unlike the City Council, appointing officers and employees and defining responsibilities.

What do you believe is the appropriate role of the School Committee vis-à-vis the Superintendent in the active management of school district concerns?

What are your top priorities for the Worcester Public Schools? What will be your first item of business?

In order to build an informed community and maintain a strong middle class, municipalities must provide a superior public school system with a diversity of educational options. While Worcester offers many educational alternatives, the WPS continues to struggle as a Level 4 (out of 5) school district due to the existence of a single Level 4 school within the system.

What are your priorities for the Worcester Public Schools and how will you seek to implement them? Only one item can be the first order of business—what will be your first initiative as a member of the School Committee?

In which Standing Committees would you like to serve?

The Mayor is responsible for appointing three committee members to each of the School Committee’s four Standing Committees. The Mayor may take individual members’ qualifications and preferences into account when assigning seats. Committee members have the ability to drive the conversation in a variety of subject areas, and can more easily prioritize their chosen causes.

On which Standing Committees would you like to serve? What makes you qualified in those areas, and what policies would you emphasize?

What is your vision for the upcoming WPS Strategic Plan?

The Worcester Public Schools Strategic Planning Task Force is currently working to outline the first strategic plan for local public education since 1992. The goal is to generate community support for the steps necessary to make the Worcester Public Schools the best urban school district in the nation. The Research Bureau, the Worcester Education Collaborative, and The Rennie Center are supporting the effort, in collaboration with the Superintendent, Administration, and members of the civic and business community.

What should be included or prioritized in the strategic plan? How should the WPS work to improve student achievement?

What is the role of standardized testing in the Worcester Public Schools?

Standardized testing is often the subject of public debate. Yet under Massachusetts and federal law, proficiency on standardized tests like the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is required for graduation from a publicly funded high school. The Commonwealth has adapted its educational standards to the Common Core and is working to establish a new system of testing for competency. While some oppose these state-mandated tests, others believe they are a necessary measure of performance and hold both students and educators accountable.

How important are standardized tests as a measure of student and school system achievement?

What should be done to improve the physical condition of educational facilities in Worcester?

WPS manages 62 public buildings throughout Worcester, consisting of 2.3 million square feet on 400 acres of land. Eleven of these buildings were built prior to 1900 and only five of these buildings were built or substantially renovated in the last 15 years. An older building stock brings challenges of maintenance and modernization. While energy upgrades have been completed lately under the City’s Energy Services

Company contract, the City typically provides at least \$3 million annually for school renovation projects, according to the WPS FY18 Budget.

With a new Nelson Place School completed, and renovation or replacement of South High Community School and Doherty Memorial High School on the horizon, how should the WPS identify, plan for, and fund other major projects necessary to ensure safe environments conducive to learning?

How should WPS balance central administration and classroom resources?

The Durkin Administration Building houses many important positions, and no large school system could survive without leadership in top district positions and coordination among schools. But the high pay and low profile of non-classroom positions has made them the target of cost cutters in election years and on the School Committee floor. Some argue that large class sizes and understaffed schools show the need to refocus resources on teachers and other frontline workers. Others say a strong central administration is necessary to keep the district running as a system.

Is the current administration/classroom split effective, or would you argue for a change in resource allocation?

Should principals have more authority over hiring and firing staff?

Under existing contracts, internal candidates with seniority have significant priority in hiring for open positions in the WPS. Removing ineffectual teachers is complicated due to an arbitration process that teachers may invoke upon dismissal. Recognizing that it is difficult to hold administrators accountable for student outcomes when they have limited control over the classroom experience, Innovation Schools (Worcester has seven) and Level 4 schools (Worcester has one) do allow principals broader discretion in hiring and firing, conditioned on measurable improvements to overall student and school performance.

Do you believe principals and school administrators should have greater flexibility over teacher assignments? How would you work to modify existing contracts to improve accountability?

What new resources are needed to support a diverse student body?

As a large urban center, and a Gateway City community, Worcester is home to a diverse array of students and families from all walks of life. But school systems often struggle to find the financial, human, and educational resources to accommodate such students—a point illustrated by the U.S. Department of Justice 2009 finding that WPS was out of compliance with federal law, leading to a decade-long effort to better serve English language learners (ELLs). In the WPS, one-third of the students are ELL and more than 90 languages, representing a variety of different cultures, are spoken in homes. More than half the student population is economically disadvantaged and nearly 20 percent of the student body has a disability.

Is WPS doing enough to serve an increasingly diverse student body? What would you do to improve the school experience for English Language Learners, Special Education students, and others who need extra attention?

Should teachers be held accountable for student performance?

Massachusetts regulations require that teachers be evaluated on competency and efficacy using metrics of student learning, growth, and achievement, judgments based on observations, and evidence of professional accomplishments. Federal and state policies promote the use of student achievement scores as an important measure of teaching quality. Yet students in Worcester often struggle against poverty, language, safety, and other external factors that are not as prevalent in suburban communities.

How should the WPS measure teacher effectiveness? How should student test scores get factored into teacher evaluations? What types of measures should be included in contracts between the WPS and the teachers union to improve student outcomes?

Do you support shared administrative functions with the City of Worcester or privatization of non-core services?

WPS, like any large organization, maintains certain basic functions in areas such as human resources, finance, and property management. Currently, these functions are staffed internally by WPS employees. The City of Worcester also maintains a staff to handle similar responsibilities. Over the years, some have called for the consolidation of certain WPS and City of Worcester functions. Others have called for contracting out non-core functions.

Should the WPS seek cost savings by restructuring existing administrative operations?

What is the role of technology in Worcester Public Schools?

Technology is a common element in students' home life, and many schools have integrated technology into the classroom with positive results. Digital platforms are the Commonwealth's preferred approach to standardized testing. In an increasingly wired world, familiarity with technology unlocks opportunities in both education and career. The WPS has limited resources and capacity to incorporate technology into both classroom teaching and testing. In addition to the cost of the computer, providing classroom time and space for computer-assisted and online education is challenging.

How should the Worcester Public Schools incorporate technology into the classroom setting? Do online courses offer opportunities to expand both technical capacity and educational curriculum and content?

How would you address the school system's budget situation?

The state formula that determines how much money Worcester gets from the state—a funding source that comprises a significant majority of its budget—underfunds WPS by more than \$90 million, according to school officials. And while the City this year allocated \$1.7 million to WPS, exceeding the minimum contribution of \$227,000, the school budget is still smaller than many would like.

Is there a way to increase the school system's total

budget? If so, how does the School Committee accomplish that goal? If not, how do you work around consistently lean budgets?

How would you make public schools competitive with other educational options?

Local public schools are not the only option available to students and families in Worcester. In addition to charter schools, there are a number of private schools in the area. These schools make use of their independence, flexibility, and sometimes plentiful resources to lure families away from the public school system. Parents can also make use of the school choice program to send their children to nearby school districts, a program that costs WPS millions of dollars every year. Given the federal government's focus on an open market for education options, the variety of school options seems likely to continue or even increase.

How would you work to keep more students in the local public schools? What can Worcester do to make its schools more attractive to parents?

How would you improve public perception of the school system?

While WPS has its share of problems and challenges, there are some who believe negative coverage of the district is disproportionate to the actual hardships the schools face. Negative reviews of a school system can have a real effect on a community, as the quality of a school system is a big factor for new or relocating homeowners and residents. On the other hand, sugarcoating negative aspects of the school system could lead to apathy when it comes to fixing problems, and constituents want their elected officials to be honest and straightforward about any issues.

How accurate are negative perceptions of WPS? What steps can be taken to improve the district's public image?

Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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