




## King County Democrats 2025 Endorsement Questionnaire

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Jason Bennett
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<b>What type of position are you running for?</b>
School District
<b>Which position are you running for?</b>
Seattle SD Director District No. 7
<b>Are you a Democrat?</b>
Yes
<b>Have you ever been a member of another political party?</b>
No
<b>Does your campaign have a code of conduct for staff and volunteers?</b>
Yes
<b>What are your views on charter schools and voucher systems?</b>

I do not support vouchers that allow families to use resources intended for public schools in private or parochial settings.

Washington state has 17 charter schools (and that number is capped) that serve ~5000 of the state's ~1M public school students. The families and students that have chosen these schools are disproportionately families of color. Importantly, Washington's charter schools are held accountable both for their student outcomes and their financial stability and Seattle Public Schools does not oversee any charter schools.

### **What are your top three priorities for allocating limited dollars in your district?**

Seattle Public Schools has a structural deficit that must be addressed. In seeking a balanced budget, the school district must set measurable goals that prioritize:

1-Safe and inclusive learning environments for all students – The district must work with its community and city partners to ensure that students and staff have safe passage to and from buildings; and staff must work to ensure that all families and students feel welcome and supported.

2-Equitable and accessible learning opportunities that expect excellence for all learners – The district has to focus its resources on the programs and supports that both prioritize students furthest from equity, and reflect the broader needs of the district's ~50K students.

3-Intentional engagement of and clear communications to all communities – Addressing the budget deficit will require difficult decisions and trade-offs. The district needs to share these transparently with the community and listen to feedback. And this kind of outreach and communications needs to continue throughout the year at both the district and school level.

### **What are the major barriers to effective learning in the classroom in your district?**

Barriers to effective learning in Seattle classrooms include:

1- shifting district policies that distract instructional staff from their key mission of providing high quality instruction to students with a range of learning needs;

2-lowering of the academic performance expectations bar instead of raising it.

3-student and staff fear for personal safety on their way to and from school; and

4- inconsistent student device policies that lead to widespread distraction and disengagement.

### **What is the role of religion in public schools?**

I do not think there is a role for religion to be practiced in public schools. I do support providing space in school for students who need to observe their faith at key moments (like during Ramadan), or providing excused absences for sacred holidays (like Yom Kippur); both of which are current standard practices in Seattle Public Schools. I also believe that understanding different religions or religious conflicts is a critical part of studying history (as a History and Religion double major).

### **What are the primary issues with school capacity in your district and how would you like to see them addressed?**

Enrollment management and projections is an ongoing issue in Seattle Public Schools, and a multi-faceted one. The district must weigh the needs and desires of families across the district, the costs of a choice system (transportation, lost resources in the home school, etc), and the current calendar that doesn't necessarily align staffing decisions with family decisions. Recently, the district announced that it was revisiting its enrollment management practices to address some of these concerns and district staff has promised to propose a longer term approach in the coming months.

### **Describe a time—professionally or personally—when you've led through conflict or controversy. How did you reach a conclusion and how did it advance the issue being addressed?**

At the Postsecondary Commission (a college accreditor seeking recognition from the US Department of Education), we need both the higher education sector and department staff to approve us (the latter, informally).

As head of external affairs, I was tasked with mapping out who mattered at which stages of the process and how we might engage them. I created an influencer map and arranged meetings, seeking feedback.

There were a few influential think tanks that disagreed with a number of our policies. And we listened to their concerns, which they published for all to read; we incorporated key elements of their feedback but also were transparent about those areas where we were going to continue to disagree. This kind of transparent engagement is critical – listening to detractors, finding common ground, and not losing sight of your own north star. In the end, the Postsecondary Commission successfully built relationships with key stakeholders on both sides of the aisle, which is serving it well in DC.

### **Certification**

- The candidate hereby certifies that, to the best of their knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate.

Created on: May 23rd, 2025