

King County Democrats 2025 Endorsement Questionnaire

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Joe
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What type of position are you running for?
School District
Which position are you running for?
Seattle SD Director District No. 4
Are you a Democrat?

Yes

Have you ever been a member of another political party?

No

Does your campaign have a code of conduct for staff and volunteers?

No

What are your views on charter schools and voucher systems?

As a lifelong union leader, an advocate for low-wage workers, a parent of three students enrolled in Seattle Public Schools, and the spouse and child of public educators, I am completely opposed to both charter schools and voucher systems.

Frankly, these programs are often cynical attempts to bypass workers' rights, sidestep equity standards, and divert public funds to private institutions. While not without flaws, our public education system remains the most powerful tool we have to address systemic inequities and fight poverty. Charter schools and voucher systems weaken that tool and undermine our collective responsibility to serve all students.

That said, I believe we must understand why some families feel compelled to opt out of the public system. We should respond by meeting those needs within public education—through expanding (public) option schools, growing popular programs like dual language and exploratory learning, and ensuring strong Highly Capable and special education services are available in every neighborhood school.

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

1) Closing the opportunity gap, especially in early literacy. Early literacy is foundational to a student's entire educational trajectory. This means investing in high-quality instruction and supporting our educators with the curriculum, training, and staff resources they need to be successful. Seattle has strong teachers and we must equip them to thrive in the classroom.

2) Protecting against potential federal funding losses. Progressive urban districts like ours are being targeted by the current administration. In my work with a union, which is also under federal threat, we've prepared for scenarios where revenue could be cut off. SPS must do the same. We need to stress test our budget and build strategic reserves to ensure we can continue serving students, even under political pressure.

3) Supporting inclusive learning practices. All students, including those receiving Special Education services and those identified as Highly Capable, should be able to access a high-quality education in their neighborhood school. This means investing in inclusive, well-supported programs that meet diverse learning needs.

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

The biggest barrier is funding. We know what works, strategies like inclusive learning that support a wide range of student needs. But those strategies require meaningful investment in training, staff, and curriculum. Without dedicated funding, we won't be able to provide students with the opportunities they deserve.

The core challenge is that the state does not provide adequate per-student funding. I've worked closely with our legislative delegation and the Governor to push for increased investment, and I believe we must continue to fight for progressive revenue solutions to secure long-term funding, both for our district and others across the state.

Another major barrier is trust and communication with our community. The poorly managed school closure proposal last year is just one example of how the district has failed to effectively involve all voices. As a board member, I see it as our responsibility to rebuild those relationships. I've spent my career working with low-wage workers who are often left

out of these processes, and I'm proud to have helped create spaces where their voices are heard.

What is the role of religion in public schools?

In the classroom, religion has no role, except through approved curriculum that teaches about world religions in a historical, cultural, or sociological context. Instruction must remain secular and aligned with legal and educational standards.

At the same time, within the student body, it's our responsibility to ensure every student feels safe, respected, and able to show up as their authentic self, including their religious identity. Public schools must protect students' rights to express their faith, just as we protect others' rights not to participate. That's part of fostering an inclusive learning environment for all.

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

The issue we face is declining enrollment, which stems from two main causes, one within the School Board's control, and one largely outside it.

1) What's within our control is enrollment loss due to dissatisfaction with the district. Families are leaving because they feel let down by unclear pathways, inequitable access, and lack of trust. We can address this by managing waitlists for option and choice schools more fairly, ensuring Highly Capable services are accessible in neighborhood schools, and rebuilding trust through better communication and consistency. These actions would go a long way toward stabilizing enrollment.

2) What's outside our immediate control is the broader affordability crisis. Many families are simply priced out of Seattle, and this is a county-wide challenge. The data shows that a significant portion of our declining enrollment is driven by families moving away once they have children. Addressing this requires citywide collaboration. My work with the union has focused heavily on these issues, advocating for more housing development, affordable housing, and rent stabilization. Without tackling the cost of living, our enrollment challenges will persist.

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?

In both my union work and my role on the King County Labor Council, I've had to lead through conflict and controversy with clarity, integrity, and a long-game view. One particularly defining moment came during the height of the national reckoning over policing and racial justice, when our labor council faced growing calls to remove the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) due to their refusal to engage meaningfully on anti-racist reforms.

While many of our allies wanted immediate action, and we had the numbers to force a vote, I believed that lasting change required a broader coalition and a transparent, values-driven process. I helped lead a one-month structured dialogue process where we invited impacted communities and SPOG to speak directly to our members. Unsurprisingly, SPOG declined to commit to any anti-racist accountability, while impacted community voices clearly articulated the harm being done. This listening process broadened support and led to a stronger, more unified vote to remove SPOG. We became the first major labor council to take this action, but not the last.

Certification

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

Created on: April 24th, 2025