



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

CITY COUNCIL 4th DISTRICT CANDIDATE:

RODNEY C. BURRIS, DEMOCRAT

<http://www.rodneyburris.com/>

1. Please articulate your overall vision for how young people will be supported from cradle to career in Baltimore City? What will be the priority strategies within your first four years in implementing this vision?

I believe the most effective way to support children from cradle to career is via the public schools. Children are in Baltimore city public schools from the ages of 4 on up to 18. According to Pew research data, that is approximately 15K-21K hours of a child's life.

So figuring out how best to improve the schools would most directly accomplish this goal.

Before I get started, let me say this:

1. As we know, City Schools are doing much better than they were 10-15 years ago.
2. Further, improving the schools even more may actually be a lot easier than we think.

So let's jump in.

First of all, as we stated, City Schools have made significant improvements. Yes there are some challenges, but there is much, much more to celebrate. Just hop on to social media and ask parents what do they think about their kids' schools here in the city... Almost inarguably, you'll find that the schools with the better scores, the better school environment, and the better student satisfaction, are not necessarily schools with the highest funding or the latest technology; instead, time and time again it's been shown that one of the highest contributors to a healthy school environment is in fact Parent Involvement/Engagement. And guess what? That, my friends, is Free!

As a national educator, a local advocate, and as two-year president of the PTO for one of the better performing public schools in the City, I have seen firsthand how parent involvement & engagement can turn a school community around in under a year. And because I have lead the charge in doing so for many years, as councilman I can lead my other schools in experiencing this same quality-bump, even while broader issues of state funding, new(er) buildings, and city-state control are being worked out. This is what a councilman can do. This is what I have done. This is what I'll continue to do on an even broader scale for our families.



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2. The Mayor and City Council do not currently have oversight authority over Baltimore City Public Schools. Would you advocate changing the current city/state partnership? What changes would you recommend to the overall administration/approach of public education in Baltimore City?

I've long supported the idea of a partially elected school board, to help achieve some of the improvements in the overall administration/approach to public education in Baltimore City.

In my opinion, having the option for parents to democratically run, promote their ideas, gain support & (if successful) sit on the school board to implement those ideas, will not only be a step towards increasing overall parental involvement, but it may ultimately add the insight needed to help the board become more effective at the educating, retaining & graduating of Baltimore City public school students.

Because the school system here in Bmore is a \$2B business, it needs to have certain legal, business, educational, and organizational savvy at the table amongst its decision-makers. And it should also have very direct representation of the parent population of the city, as well as having 1-2 more student slots involved (having 1 student out of 80K possible applicants is too few, in my opinion, for a local governing body).

The more I research this topic, the more I realize it faces strong opposition; yet it also has strong support. In fact, the issue has seemed to pick up steam over the years with many city officials, state representatives, and area educators all showing increasing support. We may be nearing turning point.

I would love to see this change effectuated for our families in Baltimore City.

3. Eighty percent of a young person's life is spent outside of school, yet just 15% of Baltimore's school aged young people have access to afterschool programs. City leaders from around the country have begun to identify the importance of afterschool and summer programs as a critical support and have invested in citywide systems. Participation in out-of-school time opportunities boosts academics, attendances, school promotion and completion and it helps connects young people to caring adults. If elected, what would your approach be to addressing opportunities for youth beyond the school day and school year?

The best way to tell what a candidate would do with a given task, is to look at what he has already done to address some of the same outcomes. I have been working with our youth to provide opportunities beyond the normal scope of the school day for quite some time. Here's a short timeline:

- 2006: Working Together with a male college student group and Big Brothers Big Sisters, Rodney started a mentoring program for high school young men.
- 2009: Rodney engaged neighborhood youth in Richnor Recycles, an event designed to educate neighbors about the coming change in trash & recycling pickup.
- 2009/10: Helped launch a healthy food initiative, providing free supper in public schools.



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- 2010: Working Together with community leaders from around York Rd, Rodney helped start YAY! It's Friday!, a weekly youth activity housed at local churches, organized to give fun alternatives to York Rd area kids on a Friday evening.
- 2011: Rodney, in conjunction with many other Baltimore leaders, helped implement another installment of the citywide "Men Reading in Schools" program for students.
- 2013: Working Together with the youth organization, Young Men with Power, Rodney coached boys around issues of confidence and future manhood.
- 2014: Rodney launched Play Fit Stay Fit, an event for mothers and sons that promoted health, wellness and activity.
- 2015: After the Riots, Rodney toured schools around the City, engaging students about their feelings and future outlook on the city.

4. In the 70's and 80's Baltimore operated around 130 recreation centers. That decreased by nearly half by the early 90's. Currently, Recreation & Parks operates just 40 recreation centers. There are ongoing questions about the available resources of the Department based on the lack of audits. Some of the recreation centers require major upgrades in both physical plant and programming. While a few new, modern recreation centers and being built, it is clear that many neighborhoods lack quality recreational opportunities. How would you change the trajectory of Recreation and Parks? How will you address the challenges of programming and physical plants?

Audits.

I support the idea that we require annual, independent, public audits of Baltimore City agencies.

Why? Simple: The money that we seek may already be there in our coffers; under-used, mis-allocated, or non-deployed.

Alternatively, we may find that we may not.

Either way, we need to see where our money is coming from in the city and what it is being applied to, in the City.

The voters of our city have approved mandated audits, but these have not been fully/properly implemented, nor have we as the public been informed the reasons why/why not.

This is where the city council could come in and help push the process along.



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5. Young people want jobs and they are natural entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, youth unemployment is at an all time high and young people are denied the experiences and skills they need to be prepared to enter the workforce. If elected, what will be your approach to youth employment and entrepreneurship? How will you partner with Higher Education and Industry?

I believe building industry, entrepreneurship and a sense of civic responsibility all go hand in hand. And I believe that the best to accomplish this approach is via Service Learning hours.

Specifically, I think we should have a coordinated program designed to give students sustained opportunity to give back to their city, increase their ability to network and help them develop a healthy appreciation for work ethic, all by implementing a multi-year service learning program that focuses on cleanliness.

We already started working this initiative with partners from local colleges and area nonprofits. I've outlined some of the tenants of the approach, below:

1. Litter Leaders:

- Idea to get area schools involved in cleaning up the streets.
- Target market: middle school students
- Multi-year
- 1 Saturday per month
- 10 months (ten sessions)
- The immediate goal is to use their service learning hours (required for graduation from city schools) in a coordinated method to help improve the cleanliness of the streets.
- The long-term goal is to create a cultural paradigm shift, where litter goes against the grain of entire generation.
 - Ten (10) events of cleaning up
 - Meet at school
 - Clean up area immediately around the school
 - One per week
 - Alternating Saturdays and Sundays
 - Each week is
 - 1 hr cleaning
 - Bag lunch (students bring own)



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- 1 visit to waste-related facility
 - City recycling plants
 - city dumps
 - junk yards
 - Inner harbor
 - Chesapeake Bay
 - Wastewater processing
 - CLEAN city neighborhoods, to demonstrate what their city could look like with care & attention
 - Ten Hills
 - Oakenshawe
 - Roland Park
 - Mt Washington
 - Cross Keys
 - etc
- (alternative: can show kid-inspired video about Recycling/Litter/Urban-Cleanliness)

This is the kind of proactive leadership and collaboration that our City needs!

Vote Rodney C. Burris for Baltimore City Council.

6. The resilient young people of Baltimore City experience trauma every day. They are both witness to and victims of violence. They have very real reasons to feel stressed and afraid. A growing body of research recognizes the importance of understanding and implementing trauma informed care within schools, community services, social services, and law enforcement. What approaches will you take, if elected, to implement trauma-informed-care and/or restorative practices in the public sectors?

There are many such organizations in the city that help provide trauma-informed-care and/or restorative practices in the public sectors.

Specifically, organizations like WIN that provide family strengthening models to trauma, communication, and comprehensive healing, would greatly help. According to their website, the mission of WIN is to



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To promote holistic, strength-based, and faith-based principles within the human service community. Our goal is to therapeutically support and strengthen youth, families, organizations and communities through the creation of innovative services, products and initiatives.”

Positioning organizations like these to do their work in a direct and coordinated effort help us achieve restoration in our city.

7. In 2014, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake, with the support of City Council, established one of the strictest youth curfew laws in the nation and advocated for year round curfew centers. Proponents of the curfew centers thought they were a good strategy to keep kids safe and to connect young people and their families to services. Opponents feared the curfew enforcement would further strain police community relations and disproportionately target young people of color. Questions remain about the actual utilization of the curfew centers and whether or not the “Youth Connection Centers” serve their intended purpose. If you are elected, what would your position on Curfew and Curfew Centers be? How would you build more positive interactions between youth and law enforcement?

As a dad, I agree with many of us that may not want our small children out past a certain hour, as the risk of their safety increases with each waning hour into the night. Additionally, their capability of navigating the streets that they may (or may not) be familiar with, decreases. And on top of that, their ability to fend for themselves is in jeopardy.

Thus, as a responsible dad, I am not opposed to gifting my own children with a curfew to match their physical age, mental acuity, and physical capabilities.

Not all children however are gifted with parents who actively factor in these capabilities when making decisions for the little ones in their care. As always in civic society, citizens hold governing bodies as the default responsible parties when the family system breaks down or experiences difficulty in providing care (e.g., foster care, child support, wic, snap, affordable housing, medicaid, food programs, etc.).

I am not opposed to curfews, but am adamant about making sure they do what they were intended to do.

As for second part of this question: “building youth community positive interactions”, I believe in the officer friendly model. I’ll always remember being a kid and having him come to our school. It was years before I realized that that wasn’t his actual name. To this day, I remember the foundation I received of believing that officers were there to help me, and to support me, as opposed to send me to hurt me.

To further help young people around our country improve their outlook on police brutality, I actually created this video. Please feel free to share it with you whom you feel may find themselves interacting with law enforcement sometime in their future: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=patoYngPHyE>

8. The parents and families of young people are often left out of the equation when we are seeking solutions. Family and community engagement requires long term, sustained efforts to build trust and offer authentic opportunities for families to have a voice and feel supported. The Community School



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strategy has been shown to increase family and community engagement and improve school climate and culture. The city funded community school strategy is currently operating in 50 schools out of 180. Do you think every school should be a community school? How would you expand the strategy?

Yes, I do believe that almost every school should be a community school, with allowances for reasonable exceptions.

I believe with small fees assessed from the multiple operators/utilizers of the space, we can fund the expanded hours of the program.

I've seen this work in schools in my own area, and have lead this effort in others.

I believe this is something that we can accomplish city wide, with proper coordination. I hope to lead this effort as our next City Councilman!

-Rodney C Burris

9. *The Baltimore City Health Department provides chilling statistics in its 2014 Health Disparities Report. Factors of race, gender, economics, and zip code can all be determining factors for a short and painful life, and the trajectories begin even before birth. Given what we know now about what works, how will you approach making sure every child has the opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult?*

Ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult, is one of the foremost ideals of the human experience. As such, I would like to make sure that I answer this within the scope of the duties (powers, authority) of a City Councilman.

According to the Baltimore Charter, the city council is the legislative body of the City Baltimore, which works with the mayor to review the annual budget and pass laws (ordinances/resolutions) consistent with the greater scope of the City Charter. -- Comparably, Congress does the same thing (in theory) with the President of the United States, with laws consistent with the scope of the Constitution.

As such, I can propose sensible, practical, applicable solutions to my council colleagues to help us achieve this greater goal of growing children into healthy adults, and work with them to allocate funds appropriately towards this end.

Additionally, I could use the benefit of the position to help effectuate change proactively, outside of the normal lens of the seat. For example, in 2009/2010, when my colleagues and I worked to get healthy food options to the students of Baltimore City, we did so by utilizing a combination of available and newly created resources. Our ultimate goal was to provide free dinner to every single young person in the city, by serving those meals at the schools. We aimed to utilize the Great Kids farms (i.e., farms that city schools students help to operate), and meals prepared in large part by vo-tech culinary high school students from around the city. We were successful getting it into a few schools, and faced challenges in other areas. The film "Cafeteria Man" documents this endeavor.



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This is the kind of efficacy possible with coordinated effort from a few good citizens. Just imagine if that same effort was representing your needs on the City's Council.

This is why I am running. This is why I ask for your vote.

10. The bright green footprints painted on Baltimore City sidewalks are supposed to denote safe walking passageways for children to get to school. However well intentioned, the reality is that in many neighborhoods there are no safe passageways, and green footprints cut through active drug and gang territory. With schools of choice, some older students are traveling more than 2 hours both morning and evening on unreliable and sometime unsafe public transportation. What will you do when elected to make sure young people can make it to school every day safely?

Improved zoned schools would greatly help increase outcomes in this regard, as schools would be closer to homes and thus easier to get to. As I mentioned in question 1 of this questionnaire, City Schools have achieved some improvements in their school environment and delivery of service, and one of the best ways to maintain this progress is through engaged parenting.

In October of 2015, Maggie Master published an article in the Baltimore Sun that lauded the growth in City Schools and encouraged more and more parents to stay and get involved.

I believe in the spirit in the words of parents like Maggie.

Collectively, it is this kind of advocacy that will push us over the top, gaining momentum from past wins, and being spurred on by future excellence.