



## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **CITY COUNCIL 5<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT CANDIDATE:**

**ISAAC "YITZY" SCHLEIFER, DEMOCRAT**

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**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?**

As a Millennial, I view my age as an asset; I can well-relate to the younger generation, while my experience and background enables me to understand the needs and priorities of older generations. Based on that, my vision for Baltimore is to ensure that every family has viable opportunities for success, and that parents can raise their own children with greater opportunities and building towards a strong future than they themselves had. Born, raised and educated locally, and raising my family just blocks from my 2-year-old daughters great-grandparents, I understand the concerns and challenges of local families across generations. That's why my platform prioritizes improving education, lowering property taxes, creating good-paying quality jobs, and making our streets safe; but we must also focus on other issues that affect our daily lives, including helping to ensure affordable housing and easily-accessible and affordable public transportation.

As a small business owner, I understand the challenges facing companies, including high taxes, regulations and finding qualified and trained employees. I can work with the city to entice more businesses to relocate or expand here, ensuring that parents have less of a commute and can spend more time with their families, without compromising on earning enough to afford living in Baltimore.

And we must offer our youth a strong education in the best school appropriate for each individual student. This includes offering pre-K education and free college programs to all Baltimore City kids. I am also a supporter of providing career and skill training programs in high schools, particularly in partnership with the private sector that knows which job markets have insufficient employees.

These are some of the many things I plan to implement or initiate to help improve Baltimore, but there is much more that needs to be done, and I have the energy, ideas and creativity to drive things forward.

**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 believe schools benefit the best when local leadership is involved, particularly elected officials who can be held accountable by the population they serve. Baltimore City has greatly benefited from State assistance in certain areas beyond what other jurisdictions have, such as the funding of our community college. But at this time, as we prepare for a serious change in city leadership, and in light of inappropriate spending and prioritization of spending in recent years in the public school education of Baltimore, I believe it is time that the Mayor and City Council have oversight authority over the public schools. This will provide greater benefits to our students, schools, and city, not just by demanding greater accountability but also greater transparency.



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There are many who have given up on the city's public schools, but I have not. While I do believe that there are systemic problems with the public education in Baltimore City, I know that they cannot be changed overnight. We must have great patience, resources, and partnerships focused on finding solutions. I greatly support efforts that will involve more parents and educators in a proactive and meaningful way, including considering partial elected school boards. We must carefully review activities and initiatives used in other, similar urban areas, and be unafraid to implement bold, creative measures. And at the same time that we work to improve our public schools, we must also provide alternate opportunities for students, including public-charter schools.

***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?***

We need to create programs that positively impact the academic, social, and physical needs of our students beyond the traditional school day and school year.

There are programs that have been initiated that can be tried in Baltimore, without having to "reinvent the wheel". For example, I want to ensure that public school kids in Baltimore have access to elementary and middle school after-school programs that are open and free to everyone. This enables students to receive another hot meal or healthy snack, provide them with supervised social environment and help with homework, and enable their parents to work later, knowing the children are in a safe, responsible environment. And I believe that we can find retired seniors or college students volunteer to provide supplemental assistance with such programs, which enables them to help tutor or provide homework help while enabling younger students to get assistance and develop a relationship with a mentor.

Baltimore City has created a partnership between schools and rec centers, but not enough. I would want to closely review the reports of the funding and results of the "ad hoc" recreational centers, and to closely examine the New York City program that partners the City Board of Education and the United Way of New York City, via the YMCA to offer extended school services to 10,000 public school children by turning many of the city's public schools into Virtual Y's until 6 p.m. after school each day. Beyond working with 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> graders in a "to build strong values, enhance education, improve academic performance, and promote healthy lifestyles", they also offer a Virtual Y Book Club to promote literacy. What is most important is that it is a joint collaboration of families, schools and the community to work towards success.

We have to work beyond the traditional framework of the educational system. The Greater Baltimore area has great institutions – including colleges, art schools, theater etc., which we can tap into to create partnerships whereby volunteers can be trained and mentored to work with public school children. Let our school kids have music or art programs before or after school. We also must explore more apprenticeship programs, as well as internships (paid and unpaid) that enable students in high school to get a jump start on career training and experience. Moreover, we must encourage volunteerism for



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students, including in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and other programs where they can give and receive at the same time in an informal learning environment.

While we have to explore finding funding within the current educational budget, I would support and lobby for legislation in the General Assembly or Maryland state funding that would support after-school and summer programs, while also exploring private funding opportunities. There is currently legislation and initiatives being examined and explored, and I would support such and search for additional options.

***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 are 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?***

I have seen the benefits of quality recreation centers, and believe we need to develop/build/expand what is currently available in Baltimore City. While I understand that funding is an issue, we need to carefully review the city budget and its programs, streamline funds, cut waste, and prioritize the programs – such as recreational centers – which will have a key, positive impact on the youth and communities of Baltimore City. Recreation Centers serve as a neighborhood anchor, and must be carefully explored to develop the best centers with necessary programs and equipment.

I do believe that one of the first steps of the new City Council should be to initiate in depth audits of spending and resources that could be utilized towards children in Baltimore City. We must explore budgeting options to ensure that we put the greatest resources available towards the most critical funding for our kids. This includes determining what unused (or insufficiently used) city properties can be sold to provide funding for more centers, and it also includes determining what funding can be found or utilized to expand some of the programming within the centers.

***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?***

As someone who has won entrepreneurial awards at a young age, I know how critical it is to develop minds and interests, and that an early start at a career is critical. But beyond job training and apprenticeship programs, we must provide youth with the critical social skills they need to be in a professional environment. We must ensure that they know how to dress and act, to have appeal to businesses who may be willing to open opportunities for them.

The city government must work closely with the private sector to encourage opportunities, perhaps through financial or other incentives. We should explore what other cities are doing, and work with policy centers to determine financial benefits for providing financial incentives to companies that hire temporary (summer etc.) high school students for work-study or intern programs.



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I do not believe that shoveling snow is the ideal solution for providing jobs to high school students in Baltimore City. I believe they need to have scheduled, regular opportunities over summer vacations that teach and demand responsibility. Supplementing soft and hard skills training, students can learn to write resumes and cover letters, conduct interviews, and other such job-related activities.

We must ensure that we are accessing all possible federal funds, as well as private sector grants, for these programs.

**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?***

While the Mayor has discussed needing to ensure that all teachers are trauma trained, I do believe that we must have a partnership between the schools, families, communities, and law enforcement. Our schools are failing the children, and ensuring that trauma-informed-care is a key component of our approach to the children is critical. However, we must realize that Baltimore is a unique city with its own challenges, culture and issues. Mental health professionals, educators, law enforcement, and others must be working together in full partnership to create a program that works for Baltimore City kids. I do believe it must be a priority step to start fixing our educational structure.

**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?***

I believe that the curfew is a good temporary measure to help restore calm and public safety in a very short term capacity during extreme situations. But the issues that lead to curfews are much deeper and must be tended to, and curfews do not prevent the real problems that lead to it; moreover, curfews can have an adverse impact on teens who may not have a safe place to be during the curfew hours.

Teens relate best to peers. For that reason, I believe we must have a youth advisory board for each law enforcement agency/division, whereby the youth are helping to give input and implement actions that will impact themselves. For example, each area of the city has a police station, and each one should have a youth advisory board that enables young people to feel involved and have a front row seat to the challenges facing law enforcement. Most important, they would be ambassadors to their own peers, and have great influence; rather than having a mayor or police announce curfews, the youth would announce to the media some of the initiatives to help make our streets safer.

I also believe that youth must learn not to look at law enforcement as professionals on the other side of issues. I support creating more interactive and social programs, such as a community vs. police annual



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basketball game, whereby local teens play against the police – involving the community and showing the youth that police “are people”.

**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 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?***

I am a strong advocate of community schools and believe that every school should be a community school; we must find the funding. Despite a per pupil government funded education in Baltimore City of over \$15,000, our students (and schools) are failing. We need major and drastic change...an overhaul, instead of band-aiding the problem. I believe community schools is a critical component of collaboration that will improve the educational system.

**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?***

There are some current programs in place that are successful that we must expand funding for, while also exploring new programs. I do believe that some of the Mayoral candidates have some good plans proposed that we should explore implementing some or all components of for good physical and mental health.

I do believe partnerships must be in full force to ensure good health, including but not limited to:

- Schools are an ideal place to start. If we expand the school day for kids (pre- and post-traditional hours and days of the year), they will have access to nutritious meals that can ensure they are healthy and help prevent obesity.
- Well-being programs for pregnant moms and for babies is critical; a solid foundation goes a long way. We must continue the B'more For Healthy Babies programs.
- Focus on programs to combat drug addiction.
- The city must also ensure that it is doing all it can to invest resources that will prevent and combat lead paint poisoning.

**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?***

I do believe the intention of the footprints, was to give a sense of concern and safety, however; we need to ensure we are not giving anyone a false sense of security. I do believe we need to increase



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partnerships with law enforcement, to ensure more police (including auxiliary & explorer police) or volunteer seniors are along the school routes by foot or bike or scooters, particularly during the warmer weather. We need to prioritize making safe routes for children as part of the overall fight against crime.

But the travel is an issue beyond safety. We must improve all schools so most children can attend schools near their homes and do not have to travel so far for a good education.