



## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **CITY COUNCIL 8<sup>th</sup> DISTRICT CANDIDATE: RODNEY FARAJ LEACH, DEMOCRAT**

<http://www.leachformore.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 would like to thank the voters of Baltimore City and the 2016 Class of Emerging Leaders for the opportunity to engage on the critically important topic of education. Children born today must be prepared for the careers of tomorrow. I view education as a continuous sequence that begins at birth and is carried on through school, college, and career.

As the 8<sup>th</sup> district Baltimore city council member, I will ensure our Educational pipeline is supported by Pre-K-12 schools, higher education, business and industry, community organizations, government leaders, parents and other stakeholders who are committed to helping children succeed from birth through careers.

In my first four years I would work with 8<sup>th</sup> district schools to implement a system where suggestions may come from any member of the community: parents, students, teachers, concerned residents, or administrators –for expansion or change.

**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?**

The Voters, the Mayor, and City Council should all have oversight authority over Baltimore City Public Schools. A good first step was a Bill introduced in the 2016 General Assembly that will likely add two elected officials to the Baltimore City School Board after 30 years of conversation – given the Voters improved oversight.

On November 26, 1996, Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke formally announced the creation of a city-state schools partnership –he believed would transform Baltimore City's public schools. The partnership became law, and on June 1, 1997, it went into effect. A decade and one half-dozen CEOs later, the city-state partnership hasn't lived up to its promise.

I would advocate changing the city-state partnership, proposing that the Baltimore City Public School System be a city agency with performance metrics specific to graduation rates, attendance rates, third reading benchmarks, community engagement, etc. Ideally, under the new system, the Superintendent would be appointed by the City Council President, subject to consent of the Mayor and 1/3 one-third consent of City Council. Finally, the eleven member board would consist of one voting student member appointed by the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore, four voting members appointed by the Superintendent, and six voting members elected by the voters of Baltimore City.



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In order to understand my recommendations, it is important to recall that the city-state schools partnership dates back to 1983, when education officials filed a lawsuit based on the fact that the Maryland constitution says the state must ensure a "thorough and efficient system of free public schools." While the court agreed children should indeed get an adequate education, the decision was that the plaintiffs in the suit (Baltimore City) had no right to equal funding. Money may have been an argument then, but now we have roughly \$2 billion in funding for 21<sup>st</sup> century construction for Baltimore City schools, and \$42 million in funding for Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program – of which two out of the four proposed Maryland P-Tech's are scheduled to launch in Baltimore City.

Public education in Baltimore City needs to be approached from a surgical perspective, free and clear of responsibility-ducking and finger pointing. The current approach gives the impression that there is improvement where there may not really be improvement. An example of reactive leadership is provided in the 792 page document from the Maryland Department of Budget and Management. The document appears to articulate that the number of schools on "probationary status" have improved from 4 to 2 – all of which are Baltimore City Schools. In reality, each school did not improve its "probationary status" – some schools were closed and the youth were transferred. This is not a long-term sustainable fix as you are simply transferring whatever problem exists from one part of the school system, to another.

***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?***

In my 8<sup>th</sup> District Plan released via my website [www.leachforbmore.com](http://www.leachforbmore.com), I stated that "The 8th district will be the model for Baltimore's education system –providing our youth with the skill set to compete in our job market." We must start by creating district-wide Access to Prekindergarten by improving early admission requirements. Next, we must offer Pre-K-3 extended year programs for parents with students who wish to develop their pupils reading skills.

On the middle school level (Grades 6-8) I will advocate for the creation of clubs such as Future Business Leaders of America, and Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America. I will work with leaders to design a district-wide program that provides 7th and 8th graders with a rich school experience that prepares them superbly well for high school, college, and life whereby each class participates in a District Charity Project outside of school to reinforce academic course objectives, but also to instill a sense of community service in the students.



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For youth eligible to work under the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA), I would continue supporting Youth Works becoming a year-round program with a custom strategy for incentivizing school engagement and exposing 8th district youth to the jobs of tomorrow.

***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?***

The relationship between the Baltimore City Public Schools and The Baltimore City Recreation and Parks is one in need of repair. With the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Building Plan for Baltimore City Schools, the system will see \$2 billion in funding to improve school facilities. There is benefit to addressing the challenge of physical plant by utilizing renovated schools to double as recreational plants. This improves the trajectory as the renovated schools would now be closer than the current Recreational facility or Park.

In my 8<sup>th</sup> District Plan released via my website [www.leachformore.com](http://www.leachformore.com), I shared my idea for proposing that the Department of Recreation require individuals or organizations –requesting athletic field permits for 8th district recreation space, have a representative complete one hour of Physical Education with 7th or 8th grade students for each week of athletic permit use. This would increase the presence of community leaders within our public schools and addresses the challenges of programming.

***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?***

Governor Larry Hogan announced \$42 million dollars in funding for Maryland's Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program. As a product of a similar program, I am confident that the P-Tech program will be a good first step to improving youth employment and entrepreneurship.

In my 8<sup>th</sup> District Plan released via my website [www.leachformore.com](http://www.leachformore.com), I stated that "We will be the flawless education district". Edmondson-Westside High School has been recommended for a renovation and reduction of program under the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Building Plan. I will ask for an expansion of the (P-TECH) program to include Edmondson-Westside High School –granting students the opportunity to obtain their associates degree at the end of six years.

***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***



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*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?*

Introduce a guidance curriculum for grades 6–8 that emphasizes life skills, dealing with bullying and harassment, respect, advocating for others as well as oneself, stress management, conflict resolution, and firearms awareness.

**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?***

Baltimore City Police Departments should be designed in a manner to support the functions of the Youth Connection Center – eliminating the additional need for two off site curfew center. There is benefit to having the program designed so that youth offenders shadow the transactions of the police department including but not limited to traffic stops and/or homicide scene to create an eye opening experience for the youth offender.

The ultimate goal is to connect the youth with the family so the additional need to defer and gain the support of Baltimore City Social Services exists. I would propose adding an on-call Social Worker to the newly designed Baltimore City Police Department during curfew hours to build additional accountability for parents and for on-going support and family preservation.

**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?***

Every school should be a community school. I would expand the strategy to implement a system where suggestions may come from any member of the community: parents, students, teachers, concerned residents, or administrators –for expansion or change.

**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?***



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The overall mortality rate in Baltimore City has declined in the past 12 years; a similar trend has been noted in the State of Maryland. The greatest opportunity for improvement in areas measured; is in Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, Stroke, Cancer, HIV/AIDS, Homicide, and Infant Mortality – for those with less than High School Completion. I would partner with leaders to design awareness program inclusive of each of these areas.

***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?***

The footprints painted on Baltimore City sidewalks are designed to denote safe walking passageways for children to get to school; however I agree that the footprint doesn't change the community. A stronger police presence would help but is not the only tool. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Building Plan introduces many new Pre-K-8 programs. This will likely reduce the need for students to utilize the CHOICE program and provide comparable education opportunities in their local community. For those students that utilize the CHOICE program, I would propose a Charter transportation system that allows the students to be transported from their zone school to the CHOICE school.